LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE

PARSHAS VAYEISHEV

BY

HESCHEL GREENBERG

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE

ESSAYS ON PARSHAS VAYEISHEV

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Rabbi Heschel Greenberg
212 Exeter Road
Williamsville, NY 14221
716-632-0467
716-245-9520
rabbigreenberg@yahoo.com

Dedicated to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who, more than any Jewish leader, has prepared us for Moshiach and the imminent Redemption

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

1. BOTH SIDES ARE HOLY
2. GO SEE HOW YOUR BROTHERS ARE DOING
3. UPWARD AND ONWARD
4. A CHAIN REACTION
5. EARLY RETIREMENT
6. EMPTY PITS AND CHANUKAH MENOROS PLACED TOO HIGH
7. A TALE OF TWO COMPROMISES
8. THE SOUL'S METAPHOR
9. LIVING IN THE FUTURE
10. JOSEPH'S BROTHERS
11. HAVING YOUR SUBLIME LIGHT AND EATING IT TOO
12. SIT DOWN AND EAT A MEAL
13. A JOSEPH MOMENT

14. THE TWO COMPONENTS OF THE MESSIANIC AGE

15. LIGHT AND MORE LIGHT!

16. SUPERFICIAL SUPERNATURAL

17. CHANUKAH AND THE MONARCHY

18. TARMODIAN FEET

19. KEEPING OUR CHANUKAH LIGHTS IN OUR EYE'S SIGHT

20. SIGNET RING, CLOAK AND STAFF

21. TWIN STORIES

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INTRODUCTION

The following collection of essays on *parshas Vayeishev* was taken from the weekly Torah messages that I have been sending to hundreds of individuals over the past 23 years.

These messages were written in the spirit of the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Several of them are actually based on or adaptations of his essays and discourses on the parsha.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe declared that we are living in unique times. He applied the words of the Midrash to our day:

"The time of your Redemption has arrived."

The Rebbe stated further that the straightforward way for us to bring about the actual Redemption is by learning what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption. While learning Torah in general has the capacity to change our mindset, learning about Moshiach and Redemption has the capacity to alter of exile-constrained way of thinking and cultivating a liberating manner of thinking.

In this spirit, each one of these messages concludes with an application of the Torah lesson of that week to our understanding of Moshiach and Redemption, as well as to help us prepare for the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption.

Parshas Vayeishev alludes to the ultimate Redemption when Jacob's wish to settle in peace will be fully realized.

It is my fervent hope that these essays will contribute to the process of changing our *Galus*/exile mindset into a Moshiach mindset, which is effected by the study of these themes in Torah.. And may this effort contribute to the imminent Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Amen.

ESSAY ONE

BOTH SIDES ARE HOLY

Every decent person realizes that, although the results might be the same, they should always choose a positive and regal means of achieving a good end.

The ends do not justify the means.

ESSAY ONE

BOTH SIDES ARE HOLY

Joseph: Ahead of His Time

Parshas Vayeishev is the first Torah portion that features a conflict between two sides both of which were righteous, in stark contrast to earlier Torah portions.

There is, in fact, an entire literature devoted to the analysis of the dispute between Joseph and his brothers. According to our sages both sides had good and noble intentions.

Of all that has been said in classical Jewish sources about the differences between Joseph and his brothers two things are clear:

Firstly, both sides were rooted in goodness and holiness.

Secondly, notwithstanding the good intentions of the brothers, in the end Joseph's position prevailed.

Joseph our sages tell us was a prophet. Joseph was ahead of his time. Joseph's prophetic dream about his brothers bowing down to him, was G-d's way of telling the world

that Joseph in his role as viceroy would ultimately save the entire world from famine.

At the time Joseph made the prophetic prediction, no one could comprehend how it could be possible that he was a prophet and he would become their king.

Joseph More Spiritual?

To all appearances, Joseph was more worldly than his brothers and the Patriarchs who were all shepherds. The reason they were shepherds, our sages explain, was to be detached from the distractions of urban life, so that they could concentrate on more G-dly pursuits.

Joseph, by contrast, always gravitated towards the more outwardly ephemeral pursuits, leading them to believe that his spirituality was inferior to theirs; certainly inferior to Jacob's. How then, they protested, can he become their master?

In truth, Joseph was on a higher level. He was able to maintain his spiritual standing even when he was a leader of Egypt.

Vindicated

In the end, the position of the brothers was also vindicated. They were the ones, Joseph told them, who, indirectly, facilitated the entire salvation of the world.

In the end, both Joseph - with his prophetic message and his brothers - with their hatred towards him - facilitated the salvation of the world.

Take the High Road!

There is, however, a stark difference between the two. While Joseph's brothers were actually instrumental in fulfilling Joseph's prophetic dreams, the method they chose was unfortunate. While in the end, sometimes their mistakes proved to be beneficial, they were faulted for their sale of Joseph.

According to a Midrashic source, the very reason the Jewish people had to suffer as slaves in Egypt was a punishment for the sale of Joseph.

The lesson of Joseph and his brothers is that while G-d has mysterious ways of getting His will to come to fruition, we must choose the high road. G-d has infinite ways of making His plan for the world come true.

The same can be said for the realization of the prophecies concerning Moshiach and Redemption. When we look at

the negatives in our world we must believe that they are all part of the unfolding of G-d's plan. Yet, we should never rationalize errant behavior with the justification that it will bring good results in the end.

Every decent person realizes that, though the results might be the same, they should always choose a positive and regal means of achieving a good end. The ends do not justify the means.

ESSAY TWO

GO SEE HOW YOUR BROTHERS ARE DOING

"Don't judge a person until you are in his place."

And don't underestimate the value and contribution of others who appear to us to be on a much lower level.

ESSAY TWO

GO SEE HOW YOUR BROTHERS ARE DOING

A Life and Death Clash

Joseph and his brothers, the 12 progenitors of the Jewish people, are in a life and death clash. A superficial reading of the text would indicate that it was petty jealousy and rivalry much like the internecine conflicts that have punctuated all of history. Obviously, as our Sages emphasize, the debates and division amongst the tribes reflected their different philosophical approaches to life in general and the course future Jewish life will take in particular.

Be that as it may, a deep and bitter resentment was harbored by his brothers towards Joseph, to the point that when he was sent by his father to see how his brothers were doing, they plotted to kill him.

What was Jacob Thinking?

The question one can ask is why did Jacob send Joseph to

seek his brothers? Didn't Jacob know that there was a serious feud brewing between them?

Moreover, when Joseph related his dreams that portended Joseph's domination over them, Jacob tried to diffuse the situation be playing down the significance of the dreams. Why then did he not try to avert a catastrophe waiting to happen? Why was it so important to have Joseph go to see how his brothers were doing grazing their sheep in a city called Shechem?

Joseph's Grooming

Joseph and his brothers had different philosophies of life. Joseph, according to the Talmud, judged his brothers very harshly for behavior that he felt was improper. To his brothers, Joseph's attitude sounded smug and condescending. Joseph seemed to have placed himself on a pedestal because, in truth, he was closer to his father and his father's teachings.

While his brothers were engaged in shepherding, Joseph spent most of his time studying with Jacob. In Joseph's mind he was being groomed to be the heir of Jacob in the same manner that Jacob was groomed to be the heir of Isaac and Isaac the heir of Abraham. One can easily appreciate the concern and anger Joseph's brothers must have felt upon realizing that they were being dispossessed

of their role as heirs to the legacy of the Patriarchs.

A Leader of Leaders

In truth, Jacob never intended to deny Joseph's brothers their role as the leaders of their respective tribes. His preference for Joseph was to be the leader of leaders, not a leader of blind followers.

So as a way of remedying the situation, Jacob asks Joseph to "Go now and see how your brothers are doing and how the sheep are doing and bring me back news."

Jacob was not just interested in finding out how his sons and the sheep were doing. Jacob wanted Joseph to leave his insulated spiritual perch—living and learning with Jacob—and see how his brothers were doing.

From Joseph's high vantage point, his brother's position looked inferior and even wanting. Jacob thus wanted his son to go down to their level and view them from their vantage point.

Jacob actually wanted Joseph to see two things: First to get a closer look at his brothers; to see their qualities. Jacob wanted Joseph to recognize that each one of his brothers was a gem and possessed unique qualities that Joseph could not see from his ivory tower. He had to go away from **his** place and enter into **their** place.

The Sheep Metaphor

Second, Jacob wanted Joseph to see how the sheep were doing.

The Torah frequently uses sheep as a metaphor for the Jewish people. Jacob wanted Joseph to see how well they could take care of the needs of the Jewish people. And while there is only one Joseph, all of the brothers were destined to become the shepherds of the Jewish nation. The contributions of each and every one of the tribes to the molding and shaping of the future Jewish nation were indispensable.

"Don't Judge a Person until You are in His Place."

The obvious lesson is echoed in the words of Ethics of the Fathers: "Don't judge a person until you are in his place."

Furthermore, don't underestimate the value and contribution of others who appear to us to be on a much lower level.

When we survey all of history, one could come to the conclusion that we are at the tail end of history in more than one sense. This perception can then lead to us questioning our own legitimacy and role in bringing the world closer to the Age of Redemption the Torah predicts will happen in the "end of days."

Worthy of Redemption

The lesson we learn from this episode is that while from the top of the mountain everything below appears small and insignificant, when we get down to the valley we find how great everything really is.

Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (the first leader of the Chabad movement, whose anniversary of release from Czarist imprisonment we celebrate in the week of this Torah reading) describes the incredible virtue that even the most illiterate Jew possesses. Even the most alienated and assimilated Jews are capable of giving their lives for Judaism.

If we are being judged by others who, like Joseph, are on a very high level, Jacob—about whom the Talmud says never really died—tells the Josephs, the elites, to go down to our level and see us from **our** vantage point. He will then see that, contrary to appearances, all is well and we are eminently worthy of Redemption.

ESSAY THREE

UPWARD AND ONWARD

Joseph and Chanukah are intertwined concepts.

The word Joseph implies increasing in one's spiritual life.

Similarly, Chanukah captures the ideal of "continually increasing" and "rising in matters of holiness" as we add another candle each night

ESSAY THREE

UPWARD AND ONWARD

Chanukah and Vayeishev Connected

Chanukah always coincides with this week's Parsha, *Vayeishev*, whose chief protagonist is Joseph. In most years we read Vayeishev on the Shabbos before Chanukah and in some years it is the first day of Chanukah. Either way there must be a connection between the parsha and Chanukah.

On the surface there is no connection between Joseph and the Chanukah story. Yet, a prominent seventeenth century Talmudist and Kabbalist, known as the *Shaloh,* states that every Torah reading has an intrinsic connection to the Holidays that occur around the time that the Torah portion is read. What then, is the connection between, Joseph and Chanukah?

Always Increasing

One glaring connection between Joseph and Chanukah lies in his very name—Joseph, which means "to increase."

When Joseph was born, Rachel said "May G-d increase for me another child." In other words, Joseph's very birth inspired his mother to anticipate other children.

This indeed is the very essence of Chanukah as well. No sooner do we light the first candle, that we are aware of the fact that the Menorah consists of seven additional places that will be used in subsequent nights to increase ("*Yosef*") more light.

And just as the theme of increase is alluded to in the very name of Joseph, similarly, the very name Chanukah is said to form an acronym for the following sentence: Eight candles, and the law is resolved in accordance with the School of Hillel.

(The "Ch"-stands for *Ches*-the number eight. The "n" of Chanukah stands for *Neiros*, candles or lights. The "u" stands for the word "*v'Halacha*," which means "and the law is resolved." The "k" stands for *k'beis* that means "in accordance with the School of." And finally, the "h" of Chanukah stands for "Hillel".)

All of this implies that the very name of Chanukah captures the ideal of "continually increasing" and "rising in matters of holiness," two expressions that the Talmud employs with regard to the lighting of the Menorah.

Brothers Fighting

As we get into the story of Joseph and his brothers, we can see yet another dimension of the relationship between this episode and the Chanukah saga.

Both incidents involved an internecine conflict. The story of Chanukah was not just a struggle between the Jews and their Syrian-Greek oppressors. But like the struggle between Joseph and his brothers, it also involved an internal struggle between the loyalist Jews and the Hellenists who were more than eager to assimilate into Greek culture.

Prelude to Dominion

There is yet a third parallel between Joseph and Chanukah. To introduce the saga of Joseph's stay in Egypt, the Torah employs the phrase "and Joseph was **brought down** to Egypt." The Hebrew word for "brought down-*hurad*," the Midrash states, is related to the word "*vayerd*-and he will have **dominion**." This term is clearly a reference to the idea of royalty and self-determination, and a prophetic reference to the spiritual influence and dominion the Messiah will eventually exercise over the entire world.

Thus, Joseph's ostensible descent into Egypt was actually a prelude to his ascendancy to royalty. Moreover, his decline

contained the potential for his meteoric rise, which is the reason the very same word that means to "be brought down" also means to "exercise dominion."

This parallels the Story of Chanukah, which is celebrated, among other reasons — as Maimonides explains — because it restored sovereignty to the Jewish people.

From the state of *"hurad,"* being brought down" and subjugated by the Syrian-Greeks and their Hellenist Jewish sympathizers, they now rose to the state of "*Vayerd*'— they were independent and they exercised dominion and control over their own land and destiny.

Indeed, according to Nachmanides, had the Hasmonean heroes given the position of leadership to the descendants of King David, the rightful heirs to the throne, the Jewish people's spiritual status would have continued to grow ("Joseph)" and that would have led to the Messianic Age.

Intertwined Parallels

Upon closer analysis, these three parallels between Joseph and Chanukah are intertwined.

Joseph had a unique capacity to grow and increase, reflected in his dreams that portended royalty and leadership for him. Joseph's brothers' inability to fathom his exalted nature and his unique potential led them to their

struggle against his ambition for power. Thus Joseph's nature of "increase" initially caused the rift between himself and his brothers. In the end, however, Joseph prevailed and he rose to the position of royalty, the fulfillment of his prophetic dreams, where he eventually made peace with his brothers, supported and sustained them.

Similarly, the story of Chanukah was the struggle between two brothers.

On one side were those who wanted to have unadulterated Jewish values, punctuated with the spirit of continuous spiritual growth; they wanted the "Joseph" spirit to control their destiny.

On the other side were their brothers who sought to bring themselves and all the Jews under the domination of an alien culture which would suppress Jewish growth, Chanukah was the victory for the spirit of "Joseph" that gave us relative independence, but that had also sown the seeds for the ultimate Redemption by Moshiach.

ESSAY FOUR

A CHAIN REACTION

One cannot commit a private immoral act.

Our entire universe is an organic whole, where each and every action, word and even thought reverberates throughout the universe in a chain reaction.

ESSAY FOUR

A CHAIN REACTION

Joseph's Refusal

When Joseph was repeatedly put to the test by the wife of his master Potiphar, he passed with flying colors. Day after day, the Torah recounts, in this week's parsha, how Mrs. Potiphar (for want of a better name) tried to seduce Joseph, the son of Jacob who had been sold into slavery by his brothers. The Torah describes Joseph's reaction to her propositioning him:

> "**And he refused** and he said to the wife of his master..."

The Torah then proceeds to list Joseph's logical arguments to Potiphar's wife as to why he shouldn't commit adultery.

Chassidic commentators stress that even before the Torah mentions that Joseph presented his rational arguments to Potiphar's wife, the Torah states that "he refused." Joseph, simply and categorically, said no! The lesson we can learn from this is that before one should even begin to offer a rational explanation as to why they should not do that

which is unethical and immoral, they should make it clear that it is not subject to debate and discussion.

The *Shalsheles* Note

Commentators also note that the Hebrew word "*Va'yemaein*-and he refused" is endowed with a very unusual musical note known as *shalsheles*. All of the words in the Torah also have musical notes attached to them that are chanted whenever we read the Torah. There are certain notes that appear rarely in the Torah. *Shalsheles* is one of them that appears only four times in the whole Torah.

The word *shalsheles* means chain and it describes the way this note winds. This, of course, begs the question, what does Joseph's refusal to submit to Potiphar's wife have to do with a chain?

Commentators explain by citing the comment of our Sages that Joseph was about to succumb, when suddenly the appearance of his father appeared to him. Joseph was made aware that if he were to give in to Potiphar's wife, he would be severing his link of the chain of his illustrious father, grandfather and great-grandfather, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Cosmic Influence

We can take the analogy of a chain a step further. Joseph realized that his solitary act of indiscretion would have far-reaching effects. Joseph realized that the ripple effect of his action would extend to all the future generations of the Jewish people. One cannot commit a private immoral act. Our entire universe is an organic whole, where each and every action, word and even thought reverberates throughout the universe in a chain reaction.

This thought can serve as a further reinforcement of the statement made by our Sages in the Talmud — and was codified by Maimonides — that one should always view their every solitary action as the one that might "tip the scales" in favor of the world's salvation, or cause its catastrophic downfall.

One is entitled to ask how can that be? What is the likelihood that one action can have such immense power? One of the explanations for this phenomenon is that every action sets into motion a chain reaction that affects the entire universe.

Now, if this "chain-reaction" philosophy applies to an illicit act, how much more so that it applies to acts of goodness and kindness. One relatively minor mitzvah can literally save the world because of the "chain-reaction" that it causes.

Joseph thus deserves the credit as the first person to discover the "chain-reaction" concept as it relates to our moral and spiritual behavior.

Serving 12 Years n Jail

But, one may be tempted to raise another question. Joseph's act did in fact, have a ripple effect; but the opposite one. He ended up serving 12 years in jail! Why?

The answer to this is also alluded to by the *shalsheles*-chain musical note. It is true that sometimes the positive decisions we make have an immediate negative effect. When we follow the process beyond its immediate effect, we will see, however, how everything will turn out fine. Indeed, as a result of being thrown into prison, Joseph interpreted the dream of Pharaoh's butler. This, in turn, enabled the butler to subsequently identify Joseph as a dream interpreter to Pharaoh when he had his fateful dream that portended a major famine that would wipe out all of the world's population, had Joseph not successfully predicted the famine and provide Pharaoh with a means to prepare for it.

The lesson for our times is obvious. We must do more acts of goodness and kindness, study of Torah and observance of the Mitzvos. Even if we cannot see the immediate positive effects, we must be rest assured that it will

inevitably and imminently lead to the ultimate Redemption through our righteous Moshiach.

It is hard for us to imagine that 3,300 years of Mitzvos performed by myriads of Mitzvos under the most trying circumstances, yet it is our one Mitzvah or resistance to transgression that can actually bring the Redemption.

The logic behind this assertion is simple. Mitzvos are cumulative and the one Mitzvah we will do will tip the scales in favor of our Resemption.

ESSAY FIVE

EARLY RETIREMENT

When we tackle the obstacles that surround us we liberate the sparks of holiness that is hidden within every physical object and experience.

This will then lead us to the Final Redemption and eternal peace.

ESSAY FIVE

EARLY RETIREMENT

No Peace!

Jacob has returned to his father's land after the travail he endured from being away for 22 years. His conflict with his brother Esau, the hardships he experienced with his uncle and father-in-law Lavan and the potential disaster that his confrontation with Esau might have generated, were the parts of his life, Jacob hoped were in the past. Alas, that was not to be. This week's parsha highlights the turmoil brought on by the rivalry that existed between Joseph and his brothers.

Why was the peace, Jacob sought so elusive?

> Our sages in the Midrash, cited by Rashi, provide an enigmatic response to this question. On the opening words of this week's Torah portion VaYeishev-and he settled, they comment:
>
> "Jacob wanted to dwell in peace and the tragedy of Joseph was sprung upon him. The tzadikim-righteous

> want to live in peace and tranquility, says G-d. Is it not sufficient that the tzadikim have a reward awaiting them in the next world? And they want to dwell peacefully in this world!"

Commentators explain that Jacob's desire to enjoy peace in this world was out of place, for it is an indication that he was according greater importance to the physical world, referred to as a "vestibule," than to the next world, that is likened to the palace itself.

It is difficult to comprehend, however, how a man, the caliber of Jacob – whose entire life was one saga of absolute devotion to G-d – should consider this material world more important than the spiritual world in the afterlife.

Furthermore, if Jacob's desire to dwell in peace was wrong, why did G-d grant him this request at the end of his life? Did he not live in peace with his son Joseph the last seventeen years of his life, as recounted later at the end of Genesis?

No Distractions

Upon deeper reflection it is apparent that Jacob wanted peace for the most noble of reasons, not simply for his pleasure and enjoyment. His quest for tranquility was to enable him to devote his life to serving G-d without any obstacles and distractions.

Indeed, this is how Maimonides describes the motivation that our sages had for the Messianic Age. It is not the physical pleasures and material delights that they sought and for which they yearned. Rather it is because Moshiach is associated with a peaceful existence in which one will be free to pursue spirituality that the Sages looked forward to his arrival.

Jacob, however, realized that he could not have expected to settle down until he achieves his life's work of making a difference in this world.

Only when we tackle the obstacles that surround us, and in doing so, we liberate the sparks of holiness that is hidden within every physical object and experience, can we expect to retire to a life of peace.

Jacob thus thought that the efforts he had made at refining the world in his dealings with Lavan and Esau, should have generated enough spiritual light that he could now bask in it.

Why was Critical of Jacob's Desire for Peace?

Now, the question reverses itself. Why was G-d critical of his desire for peace?

The answer is that Jacob had one more hurdle that G-d wanted him to clear before he would be ready to reap the benefits of his work in refining the world. G-d wanted him to

be involved with Joseph's descent into Egypt, because this would have represented a decline, and thus a challenge, that was even greater than his involvement with Lavan and Esau.

In Kabbalah we are taught, that the "lower" a situation is, the more powerful are the spiritual forces contained within that situation. And when one lives through that experience and resists becoming influenced and degraded by it, they can generate far more positive energy than when they live through relatively easy situations.

Even though Jacob had already dealt with the lowest of the low – Lavan And Esau – and managed to "extract" the sparks of holiness that they contained, Joseph's descent into Egypt – through Jacob's involvement – was even a greater challenge.

Jacob had never become a slave to his adversaries and was never under their domination, Joseph, on the other hand, did become a slave to an Egyptian official and then a subject of Egyptian royalty, under Pharaoh. This was a qualitatively lower descent, and Joseph's ability to withstand the temptations and pressures to change, he was able to introduce a far more spiritual energy into the world. Thus when Jacob's son Joseph met the challenge of Egypt, Jacob had reached his life's goal and was ready to reap the benefits, a sampling of the life of the world-to-come.

What has happened to Jacob is a sign for his children, the

Jewish people. They too sought and cherished peace more than anything in the world; yet it was an elusive goal.

G-d wanted us to accomplish the ultimate in bringing holiness to the entire world. This goal could only be accomplished by the thousands of years of our history; through all the travail and challenges of our existence in Galus-exile.

Now, however, as we stand on the threshold of the Final Redemption, we can come to G-d with a respectful demand:

> "We have struggled through thousands of years of hardship and sacrifice. We are ready to live in total peace. Bring us Moshiach Now!

ESSAY SIX

EMPTY PITS AND CHANUKAH MENOROS PLACED TOO HIGH

Those who think that Moshiach is not real have adopted the Galus, which is likened to snakes and scorpions.

And those who think Moshiach is too sublime for us have place their Chanukah Menorah beyond twenty cubits.

Moshiach is sublime but he is also down-to-earth and part of our reality.

We just have to open our eyes to see it!

ESSAY SIX

EMPTY PITS AND CHANUKAH MENOROS PLACED TOO HIGH

An Empty Pit with Snakes and Scorpions

Joseph's brothers were about to kill their own flesh and blood. Reuben, however, convinced them not to spill his blood. Instead, he suggested, Joseph should be thrown into an empty pit. Reuben's intention was to later return him safely to his father.

The Torah describes the pit as "an empty pit, without any water." The Talmud makes the observation that the words "without any water" are unnecessary. "If the pit was empty, do we not know that it contained no water?" the Talmud asks.

However, the Talmud answers, this is to teach us that while there was no water in the pit, there were snakes and scorpions.

What is the significance of the Torah telling us that the pit into which Joseph was thrown contained no water, but it did contain snakes and scorpions? And what eternal lesson is there in this knowledge for us?

The Metaphor of Water

Water is one of the most common metaphors used in Biblical and Talmudic literature to describe the characteristics of Torah. When a person is devoid of Torah that is likened to water, one should not think that they are just empty and innocent. Wherever there is an absence of Torah-water, there will automatically be snakes and scorpions, i.e., harmful influences and spiritually venomous forces that will attempt to destroy us.

Lest anyone might think that one can be "neutral," by not learning Torah, the Talmud exhorts us that a person without Torah becomes susceptible to all kinds of negative influences.

Connection to Chanukah

It is interesting that the Talmud makes this observation about the empty pit in the context of a discussion of the laws of Chanukah. The Talmud states that a Chanukah menorah that is placed higher than twenty cubits

(approximately 30 feet) above ground is not acceptable for the fulfillment of the mitzvah of lighting the Chanukah menorah. The reason for this is that a menorah placed so high is out of sight.

Commentators have grappled with the juxtaposition of the laws of Chanukah with the throwing of Joseph into a pit filled with snakes and scorpions.

Two Extreme Approaches to Torah

One explanation is that the Chanukah lights symbolize the light of Torah. There are two extremes in the way some relate to Torah, both of which are to be rejected.

There are some – as the Greeks of old – who view the Torah as being nothing more than a beautiful human artistic creation. The Greeks stripped the Torah of its holiness and its transcendent nature.

There are those who go to the opposite extreme and declare the Torah to be so spiritually sublime that it cannot be considered relevant to our lives. They deny the Torah's applicability to real life "down here on earth."

By placing the Menorah – symbolizing Torah – beyond our sight, to put the Torah on a pedestal and to regard it as transcendent and holy and therefore, not relevant to us "down here," is the equivalent of denying the Torah

completely. The Torah, as G-d's wisdom is relevant on all levels and was given by G-d to us within the parameters of this physical world.

The Talmud is thus teaching us, that when one places the Torah above and beyond our reach, it is the equivalent of creating an empty pit devoid of water - read: Torah, and filled with scorpions. To deny any aspect of Torah's importance is to deny the totality of Torah and an invitation to all the negative forces.

Only by preserving the integrity of Torah can we dispel the darkness of exile and usher in the ultimate Redemption at which time, G-d will remove all the impurity from the world and "the world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the sea is covered by water."

Chanukah Light and the Light of the Future

The Kabbalists taught that the Chanukah lights are a sample of the light of the future Messianic Age.

Here too there are two extreme and equally wrong approaches:

There are those who deny Moshiach and the Final Redemption relegating it to the category of a myth. Even this myths has merit, they will argue, for it conveys

humanity's dream of utopia and will drive us to be better people.

The other extreme approach is that Moshiach is so sublime a subject that it is elusive and unfathomable. It is far better to focus on basics such as Torah study and Mitzvah observance and let G-d bring Moshiach whenever He so desires. Let's not focus on it, they will argue.

Both of these are approaches contradicted by the message of Chanukah and the pit into which Joseph was thrown.

Those who think that Moshiach is not real have adopted the Galus, which is likened to snakes and scorpions. And those who think Moshiach is too sublime for us have place their Chanukah Menorah beyond twenty cubits.

Moshiach is sublime but he is also down-to-earth and part of our reality. We just have to open our eyes to see it!

ESSAY SEVEN

A TALE OF TWO COMPROMISES

Some compromises are necessary.

We must do whatever can forestall a Jew's spiritual demise.

However, there is never a point when we allow the compromise to be "institutionalized."

ESSAY SEVEN

A TALE OF TWO COMPROMISES

Two Attitudes

Who were the brothers of Joseph who acted to save Joseph from death? The Torah records two attempts to save Joseph's life; yet our Sages take a different attitude towards them.

When Joseph's brothers decided they were going to kill Joseph, Reuben was the one who suggested that they throw him in a pit. Reuben's intention was to return later and bring him back safely to his father.

For this Reuben receives kudos from our Sages in the Talmud (Tractate *Makkos* 10). There the Talmud explains the reason why of all the Cities of Refuge — designated for the protection of a person convicted of unintentional murder — the first such city was situated in the territory of Israel that was apportioned to the tribe of Reuben. The reason was that Reuben, was the first to begin the effort to save Joseph.

Let us now see how the saga of Joseph unfolds and the role

Judah played. Judah convinced his brothers that there would be no gain if they would kill their brother. Rather, he counseled, "let us sell him to the Ishmaelites." Judah's quick thinking appeared to have saved Joseph's life. Yet, Judah gets no recognition for his life saving intervention. Instead he receives harsh criticism from our Sages in the Tractate Sanhedrin:

> "Whoever blesses Judah [for his saving of Joseph, insults [G-d]."

Why, we may ask do the two brothers, both of whom made attempts, albeit unsuccessful — to save Joseph's life, receive contradictory reviews?

Moreover, it would have made more sense to criticize Reuben who had Joseph thrown into a pit. That pit, the Torah states, had no water in it. From this the Talmud infers that it was indeed infested with snakes and scorpions.

The Key Word

To understand the different treatment these two brothers received, we should examine the key word in the case of Judah. Judah said, "What gain" would there be if they kill Joseph. The Hebrew word for gain "*betza*" also has the connotation of a compromise. What Judah did was to

compromise his brother Joseph. Instead of killing him Judah advised that they sell him. While saving someone from death is preferable to the alternative, it did not bring him closer to his father. It was thus a far cry from the approach that was expected of Judah, the leader of the twelve tribes and the ancestor of the Davidic dynasty and the Messiah. This half-baked compromise might have been considered a positive act for someone of lesser stature but not for Judah, the symbol of leadership,

Pragmatic Reuben

True, Reuben also made a compromise by not insisting that they retune him to his father immediately. Nevertheless, Reuben's compromise was based on two factors and therefore justifiable

First, Reuben was concerned that his brothers would not go for his request to totally free Joseph.

Second, the Torah states that Reuben's intent was to return him to his father. In other words at no time did Reuben forget what the goal was: returning him to his father.

By contrast, Judah **did** have the authority to insist that Joseph be returned to his father. And, furthermore, Judah's compromise did nothing to ensure the realization of that objective.

On the contrary, by selling Joseph to merchants who were traveling to Egypt, he would be removing him from his father even more.

"Out-Reach": How far out?

These two forms of compromise represent two attitudes that can be applied to our own day and age with respect to our attitude towards Jewish "out-reach."

Every Jew has been likened to Joseph. In our generation, unfortunately, there are many millions of "Joseph's" who are in danger of losing their Jewish identities and will be totally lost to their Father in Heaven.

There can be two approaches to saving them from spiritual destruction. Both approaches may employ a compromise. The first approach, the Reuben approach is to do whatever can forestall the Jew's spiritual demise. However, there is never a point when we allow the compromise to be "institutionalized." Reuben never had the intention to leave him in that pit with the argument that it was better than outright killing him. Rather, Reuben's intention was to keep him alive long enough so that he can be returned to his father.

TheReuben Approach"

The Reuben approach to "outreach" is to patiently expose our assimilated brethren, step by step, to their heritage that they have lost, thereby getting them closer to returning to their Father.

In truth, the attitude is not of "out-reach" but of "in reach." We are merely enabling every Jew to discover his or her inner Jewish soul. Once a Jew is exposed to who he or she really is he or she is on the way to a full Jewish life of observance and commitment.

In truth, then, this approach is not a compromise because of two reasons:

First, we do not suggest for a moment that we are planning to stay at the entry level.

Second, the approach that appeals to the other's inner soul, carries within it the entire process that will follow. It is there in a potential state. Hence, within the compromise is the full and unequivocal attachment to G-d.

The Judah Approach

The Judah approach is to provide a watered down version of Judaism that sends him to Egypt While some may argue that this approach is better than nothing because it saves Joseph from certain death, it is still not becoming of Judah

to "enshrine" the compromise by permanently distancing the "Josephs" from their Heavenly Father.

Connection to Chanukah

The story of Chanukah is also about the refusal of the Jewish people who liberated the Temple to use "compromised" oil for the lighting the Menorah. While they were prepared to use the lone flask of oil for the first night and then not light the Menorah for seven days, that compromise was only a temporary one and one that left them no alternative.

Then G-d performed the miracle that they did not have to rely on any compromise. They were deserving of this miracle because they refused to accept an adulterated Mitzvah.

Moshiach's Rectification of Judah's Compromise

Moshiach who is a descendant of Judah has the responsibility to correct his ancestor's mistake. And since Moshiach's coming is hastened by our behavior, it behooves us to resist the institutionalized and permanent compromises. No Jew should ever be regarded as lost to our people. And no matter how small the odds of success, we must always seek to return every Jew to his Father. If it

means one step at a time, so be it.

When G-d will see that our efforts our sincere He will crown them with success and bring us Moshiach who will usher in the age of Redemption, when we will not have to a compromised world of goodness, but unmitigated and unadulterated goodness.

ESSAY EIGHT

THE SOUL'S METAPHOR

According to the Ba'al Shem Tov all of our material ambitions should never be construed as being no more than just a desire for more material wealth.

When we crave physical "things" it is actually the soul using figurative language.

It says one thing, but it really means something entirely different.

ESSAY EIGHT
THE SOUL'S METAPHOR

Rubbing it in

This week's *parsha* describes the animosity between Joseph and his brothers. While it started with Jacob showing favoritism to Joseph, it was exacerbated by Joseph himself when he related two of his dreams to them. Both dreams intimated that Joseph was their master and that ultimately they would all bow down to him. After he had told them the first dream that involved the sheaves of grain of his brothers bowing down to his sheave, they responded by showing their animosity to him.

Joseph, however, did not relent. As commentators point out, Joseph, incredulously, continued to relate to them his second dream:

> "And he dreamt another dream [about the sun, moon and stars bowing to him] and he told it to his brothers."

Why, these commentators ask, did he continue to antagonize them by relating his other dream? Shouldn't he

have realized the error of his ways after the first dream?

The Anatomy of Dreams

The answer provided by commentators—with some modification—lies in the nature of dreams. There are actually two forms of dreams. According to the Talmud (*Berachos* 55b) we dream at night what we think about during the day. Chassidic literature describes this phenomenon as an opportunity for the soul to purge itself from all the negative thoughts that it harbored during the day. A second form of dream is known as the prophetic dream, one that conveys a message from G-d.

In relating the first dream—that dealt with sheaves of grain, material wealth and power—Joseph's brothers were convinced that Joseph was overly ambitious and was constantly thinking about how he could acquire great wealth so that he would dominate them. This obviously engendered feelings of hostility towards Joseph.

In truth, Joseph's dreams were not a product of his fancy. They were Divine messages of prophecy that he dared not suppress. So when Joseph realized that they were taking his dreams the wrong way, Joseph thus told them of his second dream that involved the celestial bodies as a way of suggesting that the dream was a heavenly one because it conveyed a heavenly message.

The Holy-Mundane Dream

This analysis, however, begs the question: If Joseph's dreams were truly so heavenly, why was his first dream so mundane? Why was it about sheaves or stalks of grain?

One of the Ba'al Shem Tov's teachings can shed some light on this matter. The Ba'al Shem Tov explained that even the physical appetite we have for food is truly the body's response to the soul's desire to extract the spiritual energy (in Kabbalistic terminology: "the sparks") contained in the food. The same can be said of all our material ambitions. In essence they are spiritual aspirations that express themselves in a material form.

This situation can be compared to a person who employs a figure of speech that can be misunderstood by someone not familiar with the expression. For example: If one were to say, "don't beat around the bush," the true meaning of that expression has nothing to do with bushes and beatings. Rather it relates to the idea of getting straight to the point. It would demonstrate ignorance of what is an expression for someone to take this expression literally

Similarly, all of our material ambitions should never be construed as being no more than just a desire for more material wealth. When we crave physical "things" it is actually the soul using figurative language. It says one thing, but it really means something entirely different.

And this was the conflict between Joseph and his brothers. Joseph's material dreams were just metaphors for his spiritual aspirations. His brothers took his dreams at face value. To them Joseph was just interested in material domination.

Two Reasons for Wanting Moshiach

Maimonides, in his monumental code of law, discusses two reasons why, throughout history, Jews yearned for the coming of Moshiach. The sages and prophets were interested in the freedom it would yield that will enable them to devote themselves to Torah study and the pursuit of spiritual knowledge. For others, less sophisticated, however, the desire for Moshiach is rooted in the belief that at that time "all the delicacies will be as abundant as the dust of the earth."

The question arises, why even bother to refer to such a backward reason to pray for the Messianic Age?

However, in light of the above analysis—that craving for delicacies is actually a metaphoric expression of the soul's desire for heightened spirituality—even such a rationale is worthy of consideration, because deep down that is the soul's metaphor for its desire for Redemption.

As we mature spiritually, we begin to strip away the

metaphor to appreciate the soul's true rationale for Moshiach and Redemption.

ESSAY NINE

LIVING IN THE FUTURE

The 12 tribes had an identity crisis.

Were they simply a continuation of the tradition that began with Noah of making the world a civilized one, laying the ground work for the giving of the Torah to the Jewish people?

Or were they actually the first generation and nucleus of the Jewish nation?

Were they just human beings who shared the same responsibilities as the rest of humanity; or were they members of a new category of humanity: members of a new nation with a unique mission?

ESSAY NINE

LIVING IN THE FUTURE

Reuben's Heroic Act

The rivalry between Joseph and his brothers parallels the rivalries between Cain and Abel; Isaac and Yishmael; Jacob and Esau. Sibling rivalry reaches its nadir when Joseph's brothers plot to kill him. Joseph was given preferential treatment by their father and had made a point of declaring his superiority to them by recounting his dreams that prophetically predicted their subservience to him.

Just as his brothers are about to administer the death penalty to Joseph (either because they thought he was threatening their lives by accusing them of capital crimes or because they considered him to be a false prophet) Reuben, the oldest brother, intervenes to save his life:

> And Reuben heard, and he rescued him from their hand. He said, "We will not strike him mortally!"
>
> And Reuben said to them: "Shed no blood! Throw him into this pit in the desert, but lay no hand on

> him!" – intending to rescue him from their hand, to return him to his father.

When Reuben left, the other brothers dragged Joseph from the pit and sold him into slavery, sparing his life but subjecting him to a miserable existence for many years.

If Only He had Known...

The Midrash comments on Reuben's attempt to save Joseph with the following observation:

> If Reuben would have known that the Torah will write concerning him, "And Reuben heard, and he rescued him from their hand," he would have carried him [Joseph] on his shoulders and returned him to his father.

Was Reuben so self-centered that only knowledge of the Torah's later approval for his heroic act would have impelled him to do the right thing and save his brother? Does the Midrash suggest that Reuben's attempt at saving his brother was motivated by anything other than his compassion for Joseph and out of regard for his father's suffering?

Of course, there is an even more basic question to be asked: Why did Reuben, as the oldest son, not finish the job? Shouldn't he have told his brothers that harming

Joseph in any way would be wrong and lead to their father's perpetual suffering?

The Two Stages of History

The answer to these questions is rooted in a fundamental issue concerning the brothers' identities as children of Jacob and the way they viewed their role and mission in life.

We know that the world's history can be divided into two stages: Pre-Sinai and Post-Sinai. From the time of Adam, Noah and onward the world was charged with an obligation to civilize itself by following the so-called Seven Noahide Commandments. At Sinai, G-d chose the Jewish people and gave them the 613 Commandments which they were to use to transform the world into a Divine world. Each Mitzvah we do introduces G-dly energy into the world. That energy will ultimately permeate the entire world and lead to the Messianic Age.

There was an intermediate period that bridged between these two stages. It began with Abraham, the first Jew, and continued through Isaac, Jacob, the 12 Tribes and their progeny throughout the Egyptian bondage.

Three generations of Patriarchs took the principles of Monotheism, justice, kindness and righteousness as

embodied in the Seven Noahide Commandments, and spread them to the world in preparation for the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. An existential question confronted the 12 sons of Jacob.

How are we, the "intermediate" generations, supposed to view ourselves?

Are we simply one more link in the chain, transmitting the ideals embodied in the Seven Noahide Commandments to the world? Are we just warming the world and preparing it for the ultimate Master Plan that will be given at Sinai to our progeny? Are we just a warm-up act for the real thing? Or, are we part of something much larger than ourselves; a part of that Master Plan?

In other words, the 12 tribes had an identity crisis. Were they simply a continuation of the tradition that began with Noah of making the world a civilized one, laying the ground work for the giving of the Torah to the Jewish people, or were they actually the first generation and nucleus of the Jewish nation? Were they Noahides sharing the same responsibilities as the rest of humanity; or were they members of a new category of humanity: members of the Jewish people?

If they were merely regular people and just "keeping the world's seat warm" for the real thing, their actions would be measured in a very limited way. They would only be

required to ask themselves whether what they were doing was proper in the context of the here and now, the present time. If however it were to be determined that they were a part of the future - that they were members of a new spiritual class, with a revolutionary new mission - then each and every aspect of their behavior must be examined in light of the future. They could not just consider the present.

Our Talmudic Sages ask, "Who is a wise person? One who sees the future?" The ability to see the consequences of one's actions out into the distant future is the province of the wise. Reuben's name itself contains the word for and concept of seeing, but he failed to see into the future. Reuben lived only in the present and saw himself as a minor player with limited capabilities and judged his actions accordingly.

Midrash Elucidated

We can now understand the statement of the Midrash that if Reuben would have known that the Torah would extol his decision to save his brother he would have carried him on his shoulders and returned him to his father.

This is meant to suggest that if Reuben knew that he had an important role in the Torah and that his actions were part of the unfolding of the future his entire thought

process would have been different. If Reuben had been able to see himself as an integral part of the future he would have seen his role in a far more serious vein.

In simple terms, when one knows that he or she is an integral part of some major future event rather than an insignificant cog in the machinery of the present, one's entire attitude becomes radically different. The individual will be inspired by a heightened sense of idealism and conscientiousness.

Moreover, when a person knows that he has a mission it motivates him to do more. When a person knows that his or her action is central to the fulfillment of the mission it gives the person so much more comfort and motivation.

We can live our entire lives and not understand why we are here except in the broadest and most superficial of terms. If we are told precisely what our mission is, our sense of legitimacy and authenticity is magnified.

Such could have been the case with Reuben and Joseph. Had he known that he was more than just treading water, Reuben would have done so much more to save Joseph.

If Reuben had known how important the Torah considered his half-baked efforts at saving Joseph he would have been filled with a sense of legitimacy and purposefulness. He would have realized that he was not just another individual, but that he was an integral part of the unfolding of the

Sinai drama and that his actions validated his very existence. Reuben would have been motivated to do his Mitzvah with completeness. No half-baked efforts would have sufficed for him.

Broad Shoulders

This might explain the Midrash's saying that he would have carried Joseph on his **shoulders**. By using the metaphor of "shoulders" the Midrash was intimating that he would have understood that this was his mission in life. His saving of Joseph was not just a proper and required act; it made the difference in whether Reuben lived to fulfill his mission in the world and was an integral part of G-d's Master Plan. It would have determined whether he was up to the task of shouldering his responsibility, which was part of shouldering the entire world's mission.

Indeed, Joseph's name is a metaphor for the future revolution of Sinai. Joseph means there will be, in the future, a fundamental increase and change to the world. Reuben could have shouldered that "Joseph" responsibility if he had appreciated that he was a part of the future.

Modern Day Reuben

For thousands of years, the Jewish people have trudged through the exile landscape knowing in the back of their minds that their actions would ultimately lead to the Final Redemption. However, their focus was on the present; surviving another day as a Jew in a hostile world. Except for the most spiritual of people, they could not fathom the importance of their everyday actions in terms of the ultimate future.

Our generation is unique. We have the distinction of knowing that we are a part of the imminent future. We are not just treading water. The importance of the acts that we do grows exponentially when we think of them as preparations for and samples of the glorious future of the Messianic Age.

This is likely the essence of what the Rebbe meant when he said that we should "live with Moshiach." In other words, don't live your life merely in the present, because we are already basking in the light of the future and every Mitzvah we do enjoys a much greater measure of authenticity. If you don't feel that way, the Rebbe said, it is because you still have to open your eyes and see that the Redemption is right in front of us. Let us be the Reubens with open eyes and shoulder our own 'Joseph" (a metaphor for the future

Redemption), which will return the entire world to its Father in Heaven!

ESSAY TEN

JOSEPH'S BROTHERS

The potential for negative energy is also the potential for the power to combat and neutralize that negative energy.

When we see someone who seems to be a rebel, we should not fight that spirit of rebelliousness.

We should rather channel it into the force of opposition to rebelliousness.

ESSAY TEN

JOSEPH'S BROTHERS

Unfathomable

The saga of Joseph and his brothers is arguably one of the most poignant stories we read in the Five Books of Moses. It is also one of the most difficult narratives to comprehend. Commentators point out how unfathomable it is for Joseph's brothers, who are called Shivtei Kah, G-d's tribes, could stoop so low that they tried to kill their own flesh and blood. It is no less incredible that Judah, the ancestor of King David and thus Moshiach, would "compromise" and "merely" sell him into slavery. After all, slavery is the closest thing to a living death. Indeed, in many ways slavery is a slow form of death itself.

The explanation we often hear is that the 12 sons of Jacob were flawed like all other people. After all, this argument goes, weren't they simply human? This explanation fails to acknowledge the high level of holiness ascribed by our Sages to each of Jacob's sons. One does not have to ponder the matter deeply to see that the Torah would not

regard them as G-dly people if their flaws involved attempted fratricide, kidnapping and slavery.

Reenactment of the Jacob – Eisav Saga

Among the other explanations that are offered is that Joseph's brothers thought their father was making the same error their grandfather Yitzchak made when he favored Eisav. If it had not been for Rivka's intervention, the Divine blessings channeled through Yitzchak would have gone to Eisav. This would have enabled Eisav to exercise control over Jacob. In the long run, this would have stymied G-d's plan that the descendants of one who received Yitzchak's blessing would be the ones to receive the Torah, which was the whole *raison d'être* of Creation. Rivkah saved the day and our people's spiritual future by having Jacob appropriate his brother's blessings from their father. She and Jacob risked their lives to prevent the tragedy that would have occurred had the blessings gone the wrong way.

Joseph's brothers genuinely believed that if Jacob were to commit the same error and favor Joseph over them, a similar threat to the future of the world was at stake. They perceived Joseph as a materialistic and self-righteous individual, much resembling their uncle Eisav. To them, this was therefore a matter of life or death. If the legacy of

the Patriarchs and Matriarchs would end because Jacob bequeathed his spirituality and mission to the wrong son, this would have disastrous repercussions. The brothers therefore felt justified in removing the threat to the world that Joseph represented. They believed that the loss of Joseph would compel Jacob to reconsider upon whom he should shower his love, energy and blessings.

Kernel of Truth

There was a kernel of truth in equating Joseph with Eisav. However, their relationship was one of polar opposites: Joseph as antidote to Eisav's threat of dominance over the Jewish nation. This reciprocal relationship is underscored by the juxtaposition of the recitation of Eisav's descendants at the end of last week's parsha with the discussion of Jacob's special relationship with Joseph that begins this week's parsha.

Rashi comments that these themes are connected in this way to underscore Joseph's role as the one who will neutralize the destructive power of Eisav.

Joseph's brothers were prescient about a connection between Joseph and Eisav, but they were unable to see how that would pan out. They were concerned that matters would go the other way, and that Joseph would succeed in

undermining the role of the Patriarchs where Eisav had failed.

Don't Fight the Rebels

One of the lessons we can learn from their mistake is that the potential for negative energy is also the potential for the power to combat and neutralize that negative energy.

When you see someone who seems to be a rebel, don't fight that spirit of rebelliousness, but transform it into the force of opposition to rebelliousness.

The Chanukah Connection

This week's parsha is always read either on the Shabbos before Chanukah or the first Shabbos of Chanukah. Many commentators have drawn parallels from the saga of Joseph and his brothers to the struggle of the Jews during the historical period that led up to the miracle of Chanukah.

When the Talmud discusses the appropriate time to kindle the Chanukah lights, it speaks of lighting them when people can still be seen outside in the street. This timing is to ensure that the Menorah brings light to the public and that the miracle of Chanukah will be properly publicized.

The Talmud describes the deadline for the lighting in the following manner:

"Until the feet of the Tarmudites cease from the marketplace." Rashi explains that the Tarmudites would sell their wares in the marketplace and would tarry there later than the other vendors.

If we were to rearrange the Hebrew letters of Tarmud, it would spell Mored, meaning "rebel." Chassidic literature thus reinterprets this legal requirement of when to light and retranslates the foregoing phrase in a spiritual vein, as follows:

"One must kindle the light of Chanukah until it causes the legs (read: lowliest aspects of) the rebels to *kalya*-cease from the marketplace." The word *kalya* that is translated as here as "cease" can also be rendered as "expired." Chassidus explains that the ultimate goal of lighting is to enable the souls of the rebels to achieve the spiritual state of ecstatic passion for G-d, where the soul's desire is to expire so that it can be united with G-d.

In simpler language, this implies that the objective of the lighting of the Chanukah lights goes well beyond dispelling the darkness associated with rebelliousness. Its true goal is to transform defiance into an extraordinary and unconventional positive force.

Joseph's Name

What is it about Joseph that was so powerful?

Joseph's very name, which means "may he increase," reveals some of his uniqueness. Joseph is about continuous growth; never standing in one place. A mountain climber cannot dare stay in one place. To prevent oneself from falling, one must continue to grow.

This theme is associated with Chanukah's requirement that we increase the number of lights kindled each night. The term employed by the Talmud for this progressive increase is "mosaif," similar to the name Joseph. Chanukah is all about embracing the Joseph ideal.

Chanukah, too, was a war against the forces who attempted to adulterate the purity of the oil and light in the Bais Hamikdash. The antidote to that poison in our own day is to continually add light and not settle for the light that has already been generated.

But the demands of the Joseph ideal are not satisfied by mere incremental increases. He received the name Joseph because his mother exclaimed: "May G-d increase for me **another** son." When Rachel sees the soul of Joseph at his birth, she realizes that he will do much more than just fight rebelliousness. Joseph, according to the Tzemach Tzedek (the third Lubavitcher Rebbe), represents even

more than just continual positive growth. Joseph is about taking the "other" and transforming him into a son.

Living the Joseph ideal is the hallmark of the Messianic Age. Moshiach will not only add to the light and goodness, his role is also to transform the otherness and negativity of the world into potent positive forces.

We Don't Want to be Excluded

There is another, opposite, approach to understanding the motives of Joseph's brothers. Rabbi Aryeh Fromer (Rosh Yeshivah of the famed Chacmei Lublin Yeshivah in Poland, martyred by the Germans, yemach shemam) explains that they feared Jacob's special relationship with Joseph threatened their own ability to carry on Jacob's legacy. From past experience it was clear that Abraham, who fathered 8 sons, only entrusted his teachings and spiritual role to Isaac. Isaac, too, would ultimately give his blessings to one son, Jacob, making him the true heir. Eisav was pushed aside and lost his role in the Divine plan that would pave the way for the giving of the Torah. Eisav was thus expelled from the process that would lead inexorably to realization of G-d's purpose in Creation—to make this world a dwelling place for Him.

Joseph's brothers were terrified that Jacob's special relationship with and apparent preference for Joseph was a

sign that they, like Eisav, were going to be excluded from this process. For them, spiritual alienation was worse than death. They therefore devised a scheme to prevent their apparent fate by killing Joseph first. Judah, however, argued that all they had to do to realize their objective of distancing him from their father was to ensure that Joseph would not remain loyal to his father. They would accomplish this goal by selling their brother into slavery in Egypt, a country was known for its immorality and depravity. Surely, they imagined, Joseph would not be able to remain a true follower of the legacy of the Patriarchs in the spiritual cesspit that was Egypt.

Once Joseph was out of the picture, physically or spiritually speaking, Jacob would be forced to turn redirect his attention to his other sons.

Joseph and Moshiach: the Channels

Obviously, Joseph's brothers were utterly mistaken. Jacob's affinity for Joseph was not going to be at their expense. On the contrary, Joseph was to be the conduit through which the lofty ideals of the Patriarchs would be channeled *into the other brothers*. Only Joseph was endowed with an uncanny ability to reach the spiritual heights and draw that spirituality down to the lowliest places.

This idea of reaching for the heights and bringing it down into our ordinary existence is one of the signal characteristics of Moshiach and the Messianic Age. Moshiach embodies the loftiest spiritual ideals, but unlike other righteous people, he serves as the ultimate leader who can relate to even the simplest and most "distant" Jew. Moreover, Moshiach, like Joseph, possesses the ability to instill the most sublime levels of G-dly light, exemplified by the Chanukah lights, into the most ordinary and even alienated, rebellious person; thereby transforming the "other" into a most sublime "son."

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ESSAY ELEVEN

HAVING YOUR SUBLIME LIGHT AND EATING IT TOO

By blessing Jacob, Isaac paved the way for the forging of a Jewish nation that would receive the Divine Master Plan—the Torah—at Mount Sinai.

Ultimately, it would lead to reconciliation with Esau in the Messianic Age.

ESSAY ELEVEN

HAVING YOUR SUBLIME LIGHT AND EATING IT TOO

Rivalry

This week's parsha highlights the rivalry that existed between Joseph and his brothers. When Jacob, their father, sent Joseph to see how his brothers were doing, they conspired to kill him. Reuvein, the oldest brother, pleads with them not to kill him but to "merely" throw him into an empty pit, intending to come back later and rescue him and return him to his father.

There are many difficulties with this story. Here are some:

First, how could Jacob's sons, who are all referred to Biblically as "G-dly tribes", consider committing such a dastardly deed as murdering their own flesh and blood, especially considering Joseph was their father's most beloved son? Killing him would prove to be devastating to their father. Even the most cold hearted individuals would be hard pressed to commit such a heinous crime considering the impact it would have on their father.

It is true that our Sages consider the attempt to kill Joseph and his subsequent sale to Egypt to be a serious flaw on the part of Joseph's brothers. It is also true that the sale of Joseph as a slave to Egypt is cited as one of the reasons that the Jewish people were destined to be slaves in the land of Egypt. However, that does not explain why people of such high spiritual stature could be capable of such a heinous sin. And in light of the high regard our tradition has for them, we must conclude that their sin was at worst an error of judgment not a callous and ruthless attempt at cold-blooded murder. What was the real motive behind their plan to kill Joseph?

Second, of what benefit was it for Reuvein to have Joseph thrown into a pit in light of our Sages' statement (Talmud, Shabbos 22a) that it was filled with snakes and scorpions!

Third, when the Torah describes Reuvein's intention to save Joseph it adds, "to return him to his father." It could have simply stated that he intended to take him out of the pit, or "save his life." Why the emphasis on "returning him to his father?"

The Legacy of Abraham Threatened

On a symbolic level, Joseph's brothers were convinced that he was a threat to the legacy of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In their minds, Joseph was no different from their father's

brother Esau, whom Isaac had favored. In the end, Isaac realized he had misjudged Easu and no longer considered him worthy of the powerful blessings given to Jacob.

Rebecca, on the other hand, was a more astute judge of her sons' true characters and realized that giving the blessings to Esau would have been tantamount to squandering great wealth. It would have diverted G-dly energy to the wrong place and, simultaneously, denied the positive forces the energy they needed to carry on the legacy of Abraham and Isaac. That would have been a disaster for the Jewish nation to be and disrupted G-d's plan to make the world a worthy dwelling place for G-d through the giving of the Torah.

If Esau had received the blessings the negative forces associated with him would have been energized, and the energy needed for Jacob to succeed would have been depleted. By blessing Jacob, Isaac paved the way for the forging of a Jewish nation that would receive the Divine Master Plan—the Torah—at Mount Sinai. If the blessings had gone to Esau instead, the ultimate result would have been catastrophic. The world's very existence would have been imperiled: a world that cannot realize its purpose –its raison d'être - has no reason to exist. Hence the entire creation would have reverted to nothingness.

This is consonant with the statement of our Sages that the entire cosmos waited nervously for the day the Jewish

people would receive the Torah, for its very existence hung in the balance. Had the legacy of the Patriarchs passed to Easu there would have been no revelation at Mount Sinai and the world would have ceased to exist.

Upon deeper reflection, we can understand that Rebecca's deceptive acts, though appearing less than proper, actually saved the entire world. We are taught that the imperative of saving even one life overrides observance of all the other commandments. The saving of all of existence itself surely justified her deception of Isaac to get him to bless Jacob instead of Esau.

With this introduction we can begin to understand why Joseph's brothers were so troubled with him that they were prepared to kill or sell him as a slave. In their minds, Joseph's behavior suggested that he was not a worthy transmitter of their father's ideals. The fact that Jacob preferred Joseph over his brothers invoked the memory of Isaac mistakenly favoring Esau. They erroneously felt extraordinary and even extra-legal measures were needed to prevent the undermining of G-d's Master Plan for the world.

Caution

Reuvein, however, was more cautious. Reuvein had an earlier experience that taught him to not be impulsive. In

last week's parsha we are told that Reuvein had relations with Bilhah, Rachel's hand-maiden and one of Jacob's four wives. The Oral tradition, transmitted through the Talmudic Sages and cited by Rashi, informs us that what he actually did was move Jacob's bed from Bilhah's tent to his mother Leah's tent. His rationale was that after the death of Rachel, Jacob should have moved his bed into Leah's tent. She was, after all his first wife and the woman who bore him seven children. Indignant over the slight to his mother, Reuvein impulsively moved the bed to her tent. This was compared by the Torah to having relations with Bilhah.

Reuvein, therefore, concluded that Joseph should not be harmed by their own hands because he might not be as unworthy of the legacy of the Patriarchs as they imagined and did not deserve to die at their hands.

However, he did suggest that they throw Joseph into the pit even though, as noted above, it was infested with snakes and scorpions. One explanation is that Reuvein intended this as a "test." If Joseph was indeed innocent of the charges they leveled against him, the snakes and scorpions would not be a threat to him. G-d had already promised that animals would have a natural fear for those whose faces project the Divine image in which humans were created. And, indeed, that is precisely what occurred. Joseph was not harmed by the snakes and scorpions.

We can now also understand why the Torah states that Reuvein wanted "to return him to his father." Reuvein was not just talking about a physical return to his father's home. Reuvein shared his brothers'concerns over Joseph's straying from the Patriarch's ideals. Reuvein felt that Joseph, unlike Esau, could be salvaged. He therefore wished to "return him to his father" figuratively. That means that Reuvein wanted Joseph rehabilitated so that he would return to his father's ways.

Chanukah and Throwing Joseph into the Pit

We find abovementioned Talmudic narrative of Reuvein throwing Joseph into the pit filled with snakes and scorpions in the discussion of a law limiting the height of the Chanukah Menorah to no more than 20 cubits. Commentators are puzzled about the juxtaposition of these two themes: throwing Joseph into a pit and the placement of a Chanukah menorah higher than twenty cubits.

In light of the above analysis one can suggest the following explanation:

Reuvein wanted to rehabilitate Joseph thinking that his behavior and attitude were incompatible with Jacob's ideals. In truth, however, it was a serious misjudgment of Joseph, whose spiritual elevation was above and beyond the level and "view" of his brothers. Joseph was certainly not a rebel

and did not need rehabilitation. Indeed, he was head and shoulders above his brothers and that is why they misunderstood him.

Joseph was "guilty" of one thing. While he rightfully maintained his superiority over his brothers it was wrong of him not to endeavor to relate to them. Joseph could have retained his superior spiritual approach and simultaneously found ways of connecting to his brothers despite their inferior status. And, when Joseph finally reached the pinnacle of his spiritual career, which coincided with his rise to power as the Viceroy of Egypt, he did indeed find ways of relating to and finding common ground with them.

The problem with placing the Chanukah Menorah above twenty cubits is that it minimizes its visibility. Lighting the Menorah represents the introduction of truly sublime levels of spiritual light into our Earthly realm that transcend the normal levels of spirituality. The ultimate goal is to make the transcendence "visible" and accessible to the lower levels, so that everyone is illuminated and basks in its light. Placing the lights of the Chanukah Menorah above twenty cubits parallels Joseph's superior but remote stance that led to his brothers' misjudging him which, in turn, resulted in his bring thrown into the pit with snakes and scorpions.

Moshiach Transcendence Internalized

One of the salient features of the Messianic Age is that the most sublime Divine energies will be fully exposed. In the past, as in the days of the Holy Temples, when that happened it did not always yield positive results. It was comparable to the placement of the lights of the Chanukah menorah beyond the view of most people. The Divine light that shone in the Temple did not always enlighten the people outside. As a consequence, many of the Jews were seduced by Hellenism, which sought to assimilate the Jews into Greek culture. Too much light will blind the common folk, which can be just as injurious as giving them too little light.

In the days of Moshiach, however, that problem will be fully rectified. On the one hand, we will experience so sublime a light that it will transcend the level that was evident in the days of the Beis Hamikdash, a sample of which we experience every Chanukah. On the other hand, precisely because this will be the ultimate transcendent light, it will be eminently accessible to everyone. We will have our proverbial "Chanukah latkes and eat them too."

ESSAY TWELVE

SIT DOWN AND EAT A MEAL

Before we decide to do something drastic that may distance another Jew from us, we must be deliberate in our judgment.

This action can either get us more ensconced in exile or get us closer to Redemption/

We must sit down and "eat bread", i.e. thoroughly learn and digest all of what the Torah says about the subject of Moshiach and Redemption and how our actions will achieve our goal.

ESSAY TWELVE

SIT DOWN AND EAT A MEAL

How can You Eat at a Time like This?

This week's parsha features the division between Joseph and his brothers. Joseph was given preferential treatment by his father Jacob, and Joseph exacerbated the situation by telling them of the dreams he had which portended a time in the future when he would be their master. The brothers' hatred reached the boiling point when Joseph was sent by Jacob to find out how they were doing, but when he appeared before his brothers they conspired to kill him.

Reuvein. Joseph's oldest brother, stalled for time and told his brothers not to kill him but, instead, to throw him into a pit, Reuvein having the intention of later returning and rescuing Joseph. When Reuvein left the scene the brothers sat down to eat a meal, and it was then that Judah suggested that instead of killing Joseph they sell him to the Ishmaelites who were passing by. This ultimately led to Joseph's ending up in Egypt and the rest is history, as they say.

When we read this part of the story several questions come to mind:

First, as commentators ask, how is it that they were about to decide Joseph's fate—a life and death situation—and were able to nonchalantly sit down and eat a meal?

Second, why does the Torah have to tell us that they "sat down to eat bread?" Of what import is that piece of information? What does their eating have to do with selling Joseph?

Third, why is it important to know that they **sat down** to eat the bread?

Fourth, Judah, who proposed selling him, came up with the idea only after he saw a caravan of Ishmaelites passing by. What was it about the fact that they were Ishmaelites that gave Judah the idea to sell his brother? And why didn't he think of the idea before the caravan passed by?

Fifth, and most importantly, what lesson are we to derive from this part of the episode. Certainly we can appreciate the lesson as to how we should not give one child preferential treatment and incur the jealousy of the others, as the Talmud teaches us. We also can derive a lesson about how we should not incite others against us by showing off and arousing their jealousy. We can certainly learn lessons such as not to hate your brother and that hatred can even lead to kidnapping and bloodshed. We can

also learn from this entire episode how a half-baked solution, Judah's idea of selling Joseph instead of returning him to his father, is not acceptable when it comes to another person's life and well-being.

But what lesson can we derive from their sitting down to eat bread just when they observed an Ishmaelite caravan pass by that prompted them to sell Joseph?

Self-Doubt

The fact that the Torah tells us that they sat down to eat bread implies not that they were so callous as to indulge themselves while Joseph was most likely pleading for his life. On the contrary, as the Chassidic work *Igra d'kallah* points out, they began to experience self-doubt, and they therefore sat down to reflect on and carefully scrutinize their course of action.

Joseph's brothers, according to our Oral tradition, were all righteous people. They are referred to in the book of Psalms as "G-d's tribes." In Kabbalah we are told that their souls originated in the lofty world of *Beriah*, which is one rung lower than the world inhabited by the Patriarchs, the world of *Atzilus*, the world of G-dly emanation.

A person whose soul is from the pristine world of *Beriah* is endowed with incredible spiritual intellectual powers. But

unlike the world of *Atzilus* souls, the brothers' souls were not endowed with intuitive receptivity to G-d's will; they had to apply rigorous logic to reach their decisions.

When they expressed their hostility to Joseph it was based not on mere emotions and feelings of jealousy. In their minds they erroneously concluded that Joseph was a dangerous rebel, a false prophet, and one who possessed presumptuous arrogance. If his power and arrogance were not nipped in the bud, they thought, Joseph could very well become another Yishmael or Esau, only this time there was nobody to check his errant ways as had been achieved in the past. Sarah and Rebecca each were able to control the damage that would have ensued from Yishmael and Esau had Abraham and Isaac not been informed of their treacherous ways. But now, who was going to control Joseph?

Jacob's wives could not prevent him from showering his love on Joseph. Rachel was no longer alive and Leah did not possess the ability to influence Jacob. Joseph's brothers felt that they had to be the ones to prevent him from destroying all of the pioneering work of the Patriarchs. In their mind, Joseph was the greatest threat to them and to G-d's plan for the world that would have to come through the right heirs to the legacy of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Now, the brothers were beginning to have doubts about their motives: Perhaps it was an emotional reaction and their egos that motivated them to be so bent on their brother's destruction and not really their righteous indignation and concern for the future of the Jewish people and G-d's plan for the world.

So Joseph's brothers sat down to eat bread. This is to be taken both literally and figuratively. Their intention with their sitting down to eat bread was to give them an opportunity them to mull over the situation and digest all of the information that was available to them. On the literal level, when someone does something on an empty stomach it may not be a well thought out plan. It may be a product of a growling stomach that makes it impossible to think clearly. They did not eat a feast while their flesh and blood was in agony because they were, G-d forbid, callous or banal. They had an obligation to think this matter through, a matter they took seriously and for which they should be commended.

On the figurative level, their sitting down to eat bread was another way of saying they were applying all of their intellectual faculties to objectively assess this situation. Eating bread is sometimes employed as a metaphor for study and reflection and "sitting down" implies that they did so with the full involvement of their intellectual faculties; they were totally absorbed in this process.

Divine Providence Misunderstood

And at precisely that time they saw the caravan of Ishmaelites passing by on their way to Egypt. This is where they discontinued their introspection and analysis and relied, instead, on their understanding of Divine Providence. Their dilemma was that if they should let Joseph live it might threaten everything that was near and dear to them. Should they kill him it would cause irreparable emotional and perhaps physical harm to their father.

Before they can reach a conclusion, the solution just presented itself in front of their eyes! To them it was G-d's signal to "have their cake and eat it too." They would rid themselves of the pariah without actually taking his life.

To Judah it was a message from G-d as to how they should respond. Moreover the fact that these traveling merchants were Ishmaelites was a further confirmation to them of the righteousness of their cause. To them, their brother Joseph was a repeat of Ishmael, an errant son who was sent away by his father because of his threat to Isaac.

The Twin Lessons

And here are the immediate twin lessons:

On the one hand, before we decide to do something drastic in distancing another Jew from us, an action that can have

far reaching consequences, it can either get us more ensconced in exile or get us closer to Redemption, we must sit down and "eat bread", i.e. thoroughly learn and digest all of what the Torah says about the subject of Moshiach and Redemption. When we survey the teachings of the Torah, particularly the teachings of the Rebbe on this subject, we see that Ahavas Yisrael, love of our fellow Jew, and that Jewish unity are the catalysts for Redemption and not the other way around. Even if we think that a certain Jew is so far gone we dare not do anything to distance him further. Sitting down to eat bread is a metaphor for the study of the Torah teachings concerning Moshiach and Redemption. To the extent that Joseph's brothers did that it is commendable, and we must apply that lesson to our own lives.

Conversely, there is another lesson that we must **not** follow their example, that of our trying to apply Divine Providence to an unwarranted conclusion.

While it is true that everything that happens is by Divine Providence, one cannot interpret the significance of an event in ways that do not concur with G-d's **revealed** will. There was and is no divinely ordained precedent to sell a brother into slavery. If there was even a scintilla of a doubt as to whether Joseph should have been so maligned and punished, his brothers had no right to do it. It mattered

not what "signals" they thought they were getting from G-d.

Divine Providence is to be used to reinforce the things that we know are consistent with G-d's will. When we witness an event that reminds us of a Mitzvah it should strengthen our resolve to do the Mitzvah, not the other way around.

Signs of Moshiach

All of the events of the past few decades are stark reminders of what we've been told by the Rebbe that we are now living on the very threshold of the Redemption. When we see the signs that the Torah (both Written and Oral) have indicated that are signs of Moshiach, including the collapse of the Soviet Empire and the many miracles in Israel, we must take note of these Divine Providential signs in a positive way. They must serve as sources of inspiration to buttress our faith in the imminence of Moshiach's arrival. In addition, these dramatic signs should arouse us to prepare ourselves for this time by strengthening our commitment to the study of Torah and the observance of Mitzvos.

Perhaps, most importantly, one of the powerful signs that we see today, the "caravans" of modern day "Ishmaelites" traveling in the direction of Egypt, the symbol of slavery and persecution of Israel and the Jewish people, should

inspire us to do the opposite of Joseph's brothers. We should look at all the dramatic current events as signals to strengthen Jewish unity and foster greater love among the modern day brothers of Joseph. Ahavas Yisrael, love of our fellow and of Jewish unity is the way to get us out of exile symbolized by Egypt; it is the surest way to make us receptive to all of G-d's blessings, especially the blessing of Redemption.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

A JOSEPH MOMENT

When we have a Joseph moment, subjected to pressures that take us away from our past, present and future—we should view it as an incredible opportunity to grow to unimaginable heights.

Not only do we not sever the link in the chain, we become the strongest link; we add dignity, holiness and strength to the chain.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

A JOSEPH MOMENT

The Unusual Note

Joseph was sold by his brothers and finds himself as a slave in the house of Potiphar, whose wife tries repeatedly, in vain, to seduce him. Finally, when no one was around, she grabs hold of his garment and puts enormous pressure on him to submit. The Torah states "and he refused", left his garment with her and fled.

What is unusual about the words "and he refused" is that the Hebrew word *Va'ye'ma'ein*, has an unusual musical note (trop) connected with this word, which tells us how to chant that word when we read the Torah publicly Shabbat morning. The note is a *shalsheles* which appears only four times in the entire Torah.

We already had the occasion to discuss this note as it made its second appearance in an earlier parsha concerning Eliezer, Abraham's servant's, prayer to find a suitable match for his master's son Isaac.

What we may ask is the significance of this note that underlies Joseph's refusal to commit adultery with his master's wife? And considering the infrequent appearance of this note in the entire Torah it follows that it must be here to convey a deep message. And as all matters of Torah, it must also contain an enduring lesson for us in our own lives.

Joseph's Struggle

To understand the significance of this note here it is necessary to first again describe the note. The *shalsheles* note resembles and sounds like its translation, a chain of three. When one chants the Torah, this note sounds like a protracted chain of three notes, each taking the one who chants it to a higher level.

Some explain that Joseph's refusal to surrender to her demands was not without struggle. Joseph, at one point, was about to give in, when, as the Midrash tells us, his father's image appeared before him and he desisted. To underscore the hesitation and struggle, we read the word "and he refused" with a protracted note.

But, this explanation, does not take into account the fact that the note is made up of three parts and that the word itself means "chain." In other words, Joseph's struggle had very much to do with the idea of a chain that comprises

three parts. Another feature of the *shalsheles* note is that it takes the one who chants it higher and higher. How does that relate to Joseph's struggle and its application to modern times?

Chain of Generations

As was discussed in an earlier message, when Eliezer prayed for finding the proper match for Isaac, he was thinking of the chain of generations that would emerge from this historic union that would forever change the world. When Eliezer prays to G-d to find a suitable match for Isaac he sees an entire chain of generations that will bring light and inspiration to the entire world that will lead inexorably to the final Redemption through Moshiach.

We can take that message a step further. Joseph was about to make a decision as to whether he was prepared to break away from that chain. While Isaac's marriage to Rebecca was clearly a determining factor in the emergence of the Jewish people, Joseph's situation was apparently not. Joseph was only one of the twelve sons of Jacob. If Joseph failed to link up with his father, the other eleven brothers could take his place.

"Anyhow," Joseph could have thought, "I was abandoned by my brothers. Even my father has not attempted to locate me. Obviously the slanderous remarks they have told my

father that I have strayed from his teachings must have resonated with him and he has written me off. I am no longer his spiritual heir. Why should I care now?"

Joseph concluded otherwise. He knew that his decision now would have cosmic effects. His struggle was not just about him.

Big Cogs in a Big Machine

There are many of us who do not understand the importance of our role in the broader scheme of things. We are but a small cog in a giant machine. If we are lost to the Jewish people, who would notice, who would care and what difference would it make?

The *shalsheles* note attached to Joseph's refusal to submit imparts to us a profoundly important message. We must view ourselves, when we are confronted with major decisions in life, as indispensable to the future of the Jewish people. And we must further view our connection to our people in terms of three. We are linked to the past, the present and the future. If we make the wrong choices we undermine our connection with our forebears, with our family and nation as they are today as well as with our future.

But all of this is a negative way of looking at this story; suggesting that if Joseph would have submitted he would have negatively affected the chain and severed his ties with his father, with his brothers and with his children.

"I am Envious of You!"

However, Judaism is not just about the avoidance of messing up our lives. There must be a positive message in this *shalsheles*/Joseph story as well. This is especially true in light of the symbolism attached to Joseph's name: Joseph implies increasing, adding on, in the spirit of the upcoming Chanukah Holiday, when we "add on" a candle each night of Chanukah. Joseph is all about increasing light not just banishing darkness. What positive, life enhancing message is there in this story?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe was once visited by a young man who was contemplating doing something spiritually destructive that would have severed his ties with his past, present and future. When he said what he was considering, instead of scolding him, the Rebbe's response to him was: "I am envious of you. I could never reach the heights of holiness that you could achieve by passing the test that you have been given."

Needless to say, this person was so inspired by those poignant and powerful words that he turned his Jewish life

around and did not follow the dictates of his heart, but, instead, heeded the voice of his soul.

When we have a Joseph moment—in any area of life, where we are subjected to pressures that take us away from our past, present and future—we should view it as an incredible opportunity to grow to unimaginable heights. Not only do we not sever the link in the chain, we become the strongest link; we add dignity, holiness and strength to the chain.

Connection to Yud-Tes-Kislev

This week's parsha coincides with Yud-Tes-Kislev, the 19th day of the month of Kislev, the anniversary of the liberation of the Alter Rebbe, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of the Chabad movement from Czarist imprisonment.

In his seminal work, the Tanya, he explains how the greatest spiritual accomplishments come not from the totally righteous individuals who are never tempted to sin, but precisely from the person who has to struggle with their animal soul. The incredible spiritual energy it unleashes when a person overcomes the enticements of our animal nature is unmatched.

This is a day when we reflect on our generation's unique role to live in a world that arguably has more temptations, more pitfalls, more tests and challenges than any previous period of history. It should not get us down; on the contrary, it is a sign of the times that we are living on the very cusp of the Messianic Age of Redemption.

Because our role is so pivotal we are given the greatest tests—read: opportunities and challenges—to reach for and receive the greatest prize of all—the revealing of our soul's essence and through that the transformation of the world into a world of goodness and holiness, with the coming of Moshiach.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

THE TWO COMPONENTS OF THE MESSIANIC AGE

Torah is called "Torah Or"-the Torah of Light, because Torah, as G-d's wisdom, does not "suffer" from the same opaqueness that characterizes nature.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

THE TWO COMPONENTS OF THE MESSIANIC AGE

Connected!

This week's parsha "Vayeishev" always coincides with Chanukah (either it is read on the Shabbos preceding Chanukah, or on the first day of Chanukah). This fact that these two events intersect dictates that there is a thematic connection between them.

Before we examine the connection between these two apparently disparate themes, we ought to examine the basis for this assertion that they are indeed connected.

At first glance, this claim—made by none other than the great Shaloh, the seventeenth century great Talmudist, kabbalist and moralist—appears far-fetched. How can the Biblical account of Joseph and his brothers that occurred 3,500 years ago have any connection with the story of Chanukah that occurred about 2,200 years ago? Isn't the fact that these two events happen to coincide, just that—a coincidence?

Divine Providence

The answer to this question can be found in the light (pun intended) of the teachings of the Ba'al Shem Tov and Rabbi Schnuer Zalman of Liadi (whose anniversary of liberation from Czarist imprisonment we just celebrated at the beginning of this week) concerning the principle of *Hashgacha Pratis*-Divine Providence over each and every detail of creation.

Since the world cannot possibly exist without the continuous involvement of G-d's creative powers, there is nothing in this world that can possibly escape G-d's attention and concern. And while G-d does not need to be concerned with anything big or small, He chose otherwise.

To say that it is beneath His dignity to want to be concerned with the petty details of our lives is in and of itself the greatest insult to G-d, because that places limits on Him. It assumes that "big" does affect Him because He is big. To say that G-d is big is no less a diminution of His true elusive greatness as much as saying that He is small.

In short, G-d chose to be involved in every aspect of creation, though we do not always see His involvement. G-d also chooses to hide is presence from us and it take great effort on our part to shed some light on the true nature of existence and the all-pervasive role G-d plays in it.

This process of uncovering the G-dly involvement in creation is what the not-so-minor festival of Chanukah is all about. Chanukah is about light. Every miracle—and especially the miracle of Chanukah—is intended to shed light (again, pun intended) on our perception of reality; to show us that G-d is indeed involved.

Torah is also called "Torah Or"-the Torah of Light, because Torah, as G-d's wisdom, does not "suffer" from the same opaqueness that characterizes nature.

Whenever two events coincide there must be a connection between them because, as was stated, everything in this world is under G-d constant supervision. Nothing happens by chance.

If this is true with respect to worldly matters, which generally obscure their true nature, it is certainly true with respect to matters that involve Torah and with matters that relate to Chanukah—both of which are identified with the concept of light. How much more so when the two matters that intersect are the Torah portion and Chanukah!.

Quality Versus Quantity

At this point we must try to understand the connection between the two: Chanukah and our parsha.

The first obvious connection is the theme of Chanukah that quality outranks quantity. The insignificant and ill trained and equipped forces under the direction of Yehudah HaMaccabi defeated the overwhelmingly superior forces of the Syrian-Greek Empire.

Similarly, the lone cruse of pure oil lasts way beyond its quantitative limits.

So too, in our parsha, Joseph stands alone in his rivalry with his brothers. Joseph then single-handedly saves the world from famine.

Light from the Past and Future

But there is also another connection between the two themes of the parsha and Chanukah:

It is the theme of Redemption.

The miracle of Chanukah, our Sages tell us, was not just about oil lasting beyond its expected time. This oil—the only flask of oil that they could find that was untouched by the heathen Syrian-Greek oppressors—and the light it generated, represents the original light that G-d created one day one of creation and subsequently concealed—to be restored in the future Messianic Age.

Likewise this week's parsha—in addition to the rivalry between Joseph and his brothers—it contains the narrative

of Judah and his relationship with his daughter-in-law Tamar and the birth of their son Peretz, who is the ancestor of King David, the Davidic dynasty and Moshiach himself.

While Chanukah is a portent of the light that will be experienced in the future Messianic Age, the Judah/Tamar/Peretz narrative sets the stage for the person who will initiate the Messianic Age.

Belief in Moshiach and the Messianic Age

Maimonides' writes that our belief in Moshiach is both a belief in a Messianic Age as well as a belief in a human leader who will lead us into that age.

Thus, the intersection of Chanukah with parshas Vayeishev points to the interdependence of the two components of the Redemption: Moshiach and the introduction of the hidden light.

Even One Mitzvah can Tip the Scales

In truth, even the first lesson mentioned above—victory of quality over quantity—is also related to the Messianic Age. This is based on the teachings of the Talmud and Maimonides that even one Mitzvah can tip the scales in favor of salvation for the entire world. No matter how

formidable and daunting the darkness can be, one candle can dispel it. We do not need monumental projects to bring the Redemption; every Mitzvah counts, and counts significantly.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

LIGHT AND MORE LIGHT!

This Chanukah, we ought to proclaim with every fiber of our being: No more darkness!

We want light!

Pure unadulterated light!

We want Moshiach now!

ESSAY FIFTEEN

LIGHT AND MORE LIGHT!

Internecine Struggle

This week's parsha is always read either before or during Chanukah. And although the story of Chanukah occurred over a thousand years after the Torah was written, there was always a belief that the Divine Author "planted" messages in the Torah portion that occurs around a Jewish Holiday that connect the two.

What is the connection between this week's Torah reading and Chanukah?

A cursory examination of the parsha could yield the following analogy:

This week's parsha is about the rivalry between Joseph and his brothers. The story of Chanukah is also about an internecine struggle; a struggle between those Hellenist Jews who assimilated into the pagan Greek culture and the Jews who remained loyal to their faith.

At first glance the comparison is not a very good one. The struggle between the Hellenists and the loyalists was an ideological and theological one. To put it simply: The Hellenists did not believe in the Torah and the loyalists did. The rivalry between Joseph and his brothers, however, seemed to be nothing more than one based on jealousy on the part of the brothers and the immature behavior of Joseph—tattling on his brothers and bragging to them about his superiority. How can one compare these two scenarios of conflict?

Conflict between Joseph and his Brothers was Ideological

In truth, the conflict between Joseph and his brothers was indeed an ideological one. It was about who was the true heir to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob's legacy of bringing the faith in one G-d and the dedication to justice and righteousness to the world.

Joseph's brothers, commentators explain, felt that they were part of a chosen nation that did not have to conform to the norms and rules that applied to everyone else. They were in possession of a superior way of life that was a precursor to the one their descendants will eventually receive from G-d at Sinai. They believed that they were part of a new nation that was different and unique and had nothing to do

with the rest of humanity. To them Judaism negated all of what existed in the past.

Joseph, by contrast, realized that although the Children of Jacob represented the nucleus of a new nation that would be given a revolutionary new code of ethics, their code of ethics was not to be a negation of the existing positive norms but an important addition to them.

Indeed, the name Joseph means addition. The "Joseph" approach to Judaism is to take the best of what already exists—totally rejecting their negative elements—and then increasing the good and enhancing it with something far more spiritual and G-dly.

In the mystical tradition of Judaism it is taught that indeed all the good in all other societies derive from G-d's infinite wisdom. When this wisdom "trickled down" and was filtered through the minds and hearts of all the nations of the world most of the Divine wisdom and truth was lost, but some of it remained. By contrast, the Torah is G-d's unadulterated wisdom, and it therefore contains all of the "wheat" of G-d's wisdom without any of the "chaff." Joseph, aware of this, knew that it was important to appreciate the good in the world and imbue it with added holiness.

Both Joseph and his brothers were interested in doing what was right in the spirit of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs.

Their debate, which degenerated into outright hostility, was about the ideal way to translate their ideas into reality. In the end Joseph's approach prevailed. Joseph was the one who saved Jacob and his brothers as well as the rest of the world form famine and was the true precursor to the experience at Sinai and beyond.

The Hellenists Embrace of Pagan Culture

The Hellenists also negated Joseph's approach of always looking for ways of taking the best of what exists and adding on the Jewish and G-dly touch to it. Instead they went to the opposite extreme and embraced all of Hellenic culture, including its paganism and immorality, and rejected any and every uniquely Jewish influence.

Obviously the Hellenists did not follow in the footsteps of Joseph's brothers either, but when one strays from the ideals of constantly looking for ways of enhancing one's Jewishness, it could degenerate into the total rejection of everything Jewish.

When one views Judaism to be a parallel and competing system to the others, one can sometimes choose Judaism and other times choose the other system. The Hellenists did just that. To them Greek culture seemed to be more appealing than its Jewish counterpart and they chose the former and totally rejected the latter.

Judaism: The Newest Religion

Conversely, when one has the "Joseph" view that no matter how good another system might be, Judaism seeks to appropriate that good and then enhance it, even as they reject the negative elements of that system. There is therefore never a contest between the two, because Judaism incorporates whatever good there may be in the other cultures and then adds on and by doing so radically transforms all that existed before.

Judaism is the "updated" "new and improved" brand in comparison to all the others. It is a distillation of all that's good in the world plus the added G-dly light that transforms everything goodly into everything G-dly.

Adding on to the Existing Light

This Joseph approach to Judaism is the hallmark of Chanukah, the Festival of Light. It is all about adding on to the light that existed previously. If we lit one candle the first night we light two the second night. Chanukah is all about light and more light!

Chanukah is said to be a taste of the future Messianic Age. Contrary to some people's impressions it is not a time when all of the past good ceases and some new form of good will emerge. Rather Moshiach will take the good that

already exists, highlight it and separate it from the evil, and then add on to it new dimensions of G-dly energy and light. The world will undergo constant change and growth—the very meaning of the word Joseph.

Indeed, according to Talmudic tradition. Prior to the coming of Moshiach, the descendant of King David, there will be a Moshiach the descendant of Joseph. One way of understanding the need for the Moshiach the descendant of Joseph conceptually is that it would set the tone for the future Messianic Age. It is not about beginning a new world with a new set of laws. The Torah we have now will never change. Rather the Messianic Age is about taking all the good that we have now; revealing it, enhancing it and continually adding on to it—a perpetual Chanukah experience; light and more light.

Message in Time of Tragedy

And this message of "light and more light" that defines Chanukah will be appreciated this year perhaps more than any other time in recent history.

Just two weeks after the world was shrouded in darkness with the barbaric attack against the Chabad House in India, we are poised to celebrate the Festival of Light.

With the tragic loss of life—and specifically with the extinguishing of the light of the heroic Chabad Shluchim/emissaries who devoted their lives to bring warmth, love and light to countless people—the world has become a much darker place.

No more darkness!

This Chanukah, when we light the Chanukah candles, we will be required to invest so much more of the light of our souls to make up for the tragic loss of light. And each night we will add to the light of the preceding night, until the light will become so strong that it will banish the darkness forever.

This Chanukah, when we light the Chanukah lights we ought to add a prayer for G-d to bring an end to the darkness associated with exile and usher in the ultimate age of Light when peace will reign throughout the world—with the coming of Moshiach.

This Chanukah, when we light the Chanukah candles, we ought to add in our commitment to live our lives now permeated with the light of Torah and Mitzvos; in the manner that we imagine we will live them in the Messianic Age.

This Chanukah, when we give the traditional Chanukah gelt to our children let us think about the orphaned Moishe—who does not have parents to give him Chanukah gelt.

This Chanukah, when we spin the dreidel with the Hebrew letters that form the words "a great miracle happened there" we ought to think of the great miracle that enabled Sandra, the righteous gentile, to save little Moishe and to show gratitude for her heroism and devotion to the Holtzberg family.

This Chanukah, we ought to proclaim with every fiber of our being: No more darkness! We want light! Pure unadulterated light! We want Moshiach now!

ESSAY SIXTEEN

SUPERFICIAL SUPERNATURAL

Reuben "suffered" from a syndrome from which we all suffer: we are often content with our good intentions and a minimal amount of effort to make these good intentions materialize.

We often lack the determination and preparation to facilitate complete success in our endeavors.

The Chanukah message is:

While G-d gives us the miracle-inspiration, we must do our part to make the inspiration a fixed part of our being; one that will crown our efforts with success; one that will endure forever.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

SUPERFICIAL SUPERNATURAL

Snakes and Scorpions

Joseph's brothers were about to kill their own flesh and blood. Reuben, however, convinced them not to spill his blood. Instead, he suggested, Joseph should be thrown into an empty pit. The Torah attests to the fact that Reuben's intention was to later return Joseph safely to his father.

The Torah describes the pit as "an empty pit, without any water." The Talmud, cited by Rashi, makes the observation that the words "without any water" are unnecessary. "If the pit was empty, do we not know that it contained no water?" the Talmud asks.

However, the Talmud answers, this is to teach us that "while there was no water in the pit, there were snakes and scorpions."

It is interesting that the Talmud makes this observation about the empty pit in the context of a discussion of the laws of Chanukah. The Talmud states that a Chanukah menorah that is placed higher than twenty cubits

(approximately 30 feet) above ground is not acceptable for the fulfillment of the mitzvah of lighting the Chanukah menorah. The reason for this is that a menorah placed so high is out of sight.

Commentators have grappled with the juxtaposition of the laws of Chanukah with the throwing of Joseph into a pit filled with snakes and scorpions. Some suggest that these two statements were authored by the same rabbi – Rabbi Tanchum and were therefore "lumped together." Some add that these two statements may have been made by him at the same occasion; on the Shabbat that immediately precedes Chanukah, the Shabbat in which we read the parsha of Vayeishev.

But, since there are no coincidences in life, and certainly not in Torah, there must be a thematic connection between the two teachings of Rabbi Tanchum. What, we are therefore entitled to ask, is the connection between not placing a Chanukah Menorah above 20 cubits and the fact that the pit into which Joseph was thrown into at the behest of his brother Reuben was filled with snakes and scorpions? (See Essay Six for a different approach to this matter.)

The Three Functions of Miracles

One possible explanation is that lighting the Chanukah candles is a reminder of the great miracles that occurred at the time when the Syrian Greeks sought to extinguish the flame of Judaism. The lighting of the Chanukah candles remind us of the miracle of the lone cruse of oil that lasted for eight days instead of one. It also reminds us of the incredible miracle of the small band of Maccabees who defeated the powerful Syrian-Greek forces.

Any time a miracle occurs it is meant to inspire us. When we experience a miracle in our own lives, or commemorate (more accurately: relive) a miracle of the past, it should serve at least three functions:

A miracle, first and foremost, is a reminder that there is a G-d. Even one who believes in G-d may not always be aware of the truth of His existence and may harbor some doubts. A miracle is a stark reminder that G-d exists.

Secondly, a miracle alerts us to the fact that G-d is in control of His world. While there are many people who profess belief in a Creator, they do not believe that the Creator has any control over the universe; that He left it in the hands of nature and cannot alter the way the affairs of the world run. A miracle demonstrates that G-d is intimately involved in the goings on of the universe He created.

Thirdly, the miracle we experience inspires us to perform a miracle in our own lives. Just as G-d "went out of His way," as it were, to perform the supernatural event, so too we are inspired to reciprocate and go out of our way, go beyond our own nature, to do something special. A miracle inspires us to live a more wholesome, meaningful, G-dly and self-transcendent way.

However, the degree to which the miracle will have any effect on our awareness of G-d's presence and role in our lives depends on the way we perceive the miracle and the way we are wired to be receptive to it.

Overwhelming

If one views the miracle as some awesome manifestation of G-d's power that overwhelms us it will eventually "underwhelm" us. When something goes over our head it does not enter our consciousness and cannot have the desired effect. Thus, experiencing a miracle, while it might impress us and even jolt us, it may not leave an enduring mark on us.

Proof of this premise can be provided for from the way the Jewish people reacted in the desert just months, weeks and even days after they viewed the most spectacular miracles associated with the Exodus from Egypt such as the Ten Plagues and the Splitting of the Red Sea. They complained,

rebelled and even doubted that G-d was with them. All the effects of the miracles they experienced wore off. They were clearly not prepared to internalize the miracles and reap the full benefit of their experiences.

Twenty: A Crowning Achievement

This then is the symbolic meaning of the statement that if one placed the Menorah at a height of twenty cubits he has not fulfilled his obligation to light the Chanukah menorah. If we allow the realization of the great miracles go way over our heads the message of Chanukah will be missing.

And the number "twenty" is also significant. In Kabbalah the number twenty is said to refer to a transcendent level of spirituality, for the Hebrew word for twenty-*esrim*, has the same numerical value as the word *Keser*-crown. Just as a crown is above the head that it adorns, so too, if we experience a miracle that goes above our head; that is not internalized and made relevant to our lives, it will not do the trick. It may add some adornment and nobility to our lives, but when the crown is removed we remain the same as we were before.

"Wow" is not Enough

The message of the Chanukah menorah placed too high is that we should not let our remembrance of the miracles of Chanukah simply elicit a "wow!" from us.

It goes without saying that we should not look at the entire ritual of lighting the Chanukah menorah as a cultural and historical event that has no or minimal relevance to our lives today. We must place the Chanukah menorah at a height that allows us to be inspired and nurtured by its message. The miracle has to be reflected upon during and we must refine ourselves even before Chanukah to be receptive to the miracle. Otherwise the miracle will have but a superficial effect on us.

Thus the message of the law that negates placing the Menorah too high is a message against superficiality. It is a message to use our minds and tune our hearts to the message of Chanukah and all that is good and holy in Judaism. Superficial remembrances will not have the desired effect.

We can now understand the juxtaposition of this law concerning the desired height of the Chanukah menorah and the statement that the pit Joseph was thrown into at Reuben's request was filled with snakes and scorpions:

An obvious question can be raised about the manner in which Reuben sought to save his brother Joseph from his

brothers' decision to kill him. If Reuben was so keen about saving his brother's life—and we have no reason to doubt his sincerity and good intentions—how could he have considered throwing Joseph in a pit infested with deadly snakes and scorpions?

Reuben's Superficial Salvation

The obvious answer is that Reuben was not aware of the fact that the pit was not empty. He might have given a superficial glance at the pit and saw that it was empty, but he did not check it out more thoroughly.

Reuben was indeed inspired to save his brother; he was ready to do something unconventional and bold. Yet he was not prepared to make his good intentions viable and successful.

Reuben "suffered" from a syndrome from which we all suffer: we are often content with our good intentions and a minimal amount of effort to make these good intentions materialize. But we often lack the determination and preparation to facilitate complete success in our endeavors. We either are not inspired sufficiently by the cause we profess to do all that it takes to make it happen, or we lack the tools and knowledge that are necessary for the success of the mission. Either way, the inspiration we had was not

integrated with all of our faculties. Thus, the effects of our actions will be short-lived.

The Chanukah Message of Our Time

The Chanukah message and the failure of Reuben are essentially this: While G-d gives us the miracle-inspiration, we must do our part to make the inspiration a fixed part of our being; one that will crown our efforts with success; one that will endure forever.

We are living at the tail end of the period of exile and ready to enter into a permanent state of peace and goodness, with the advent of the Messianic Age to be ushered in by Moshiach.

What is it that distinguishes our Judaism now and our Judaism in the future?

One salient difference is the degree to which our efforts are real and enduring. In exile conditions we have lost our ability to keep the Chanukah Menorah burning close to us. We find it difficult to see the G-dly light that illuminates our lives. And even when we are inspired, the inspiration quickly fizzles out. But in the Messianic Age, we will be able to internalize the light of Chanukah and allow the inspiration to have a permanent effect on us.

As we stand at the nexus of exile-Galus and Redemption-Geulah, it behooves us to take the Chanukah message of anti-superficiality especially when dealing with supernatural-ity more seriously.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

CHANUKAH AND THE MONARCHY

A true Jewish leader—contrary to most political and religious leaders of our time—has to put the interests of his people—even of one individual—ahead of his own personal interest and prestige.

This was the hallmark of Jewish leadership throughout the ages.

And this is one of the signs that we will use to determine the identity of the ultimate leader—Moshiach.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

CHANUKAH AND THE MONARCHY

The Link to Chanukah

This week's Torah portion—*Vayeishev*—precedes Chanukah by just a few days. There is a well-known tradition that there is always a close connection between weekly Torah readings and the festivals that occur in close proximity to the Torah portion.

In this spirit, we ought to reflect on one theme that links this week's parsha with Chanukah.

The heroes of Chanukah were a priestly clan, known as the Hasmonean family.

He Hasmonean Era and Error

In the aftermath of their victory over the Syrian Greek forces and their rededication of the Temple, the Hasmoneans arrogated to themselves the role of monarchs. And while, initially, these leaders were righteous and pious men who were dedicated to making the Land of Israel

reflect its original status as a G-dly land, subsequent generations of Hasmonean monarchs degenerated spiritually and had thereby sown the sins for their eventual demise. Every single member of that Hasmonean dynasty was murdered by King Herod. According to the Talmud, there was not one surviving descendent of that glorious and heroic family!

Nachmanides, the great 13th century commentator states that their extinction was a punishment for assuming the role of monarchs. He further states that they had committed a double sin:

First, it is forbidden for a Kohain-priest, whose role is strictly spiritual and Temple oriented, to serve as a monarch. The two roles must be separated.

Second, even a non-priest has an obligation to coronate a member of the Davidic dynasty, to whom the Torah promises the monarchy. And while the Hasmoneans were pious and heroic individuals without whom the miracle of Chanukah would not have occurred, nevertheless, they erred egregiously, Nachmanides writes, for not having abdicated in favor of a scion of the Davidic family.

He Uniqueness of the Davidic Line

What is it about the Davidic family—that traces itself back to Judah, the fourth of Jacob's sons that we read about in this week's parsha—that makes them the worthy occupiers of the throne of Israel?

There were many traits that King David and his progenitor Judah possessed that made them and their kin worthy of being the leaders of the Jewish nation. We would expect to hear an echo of Judah's uniqueness in this week's parsha, the one in which we are introduced to the adult Judah.

Judah's Qualifications for Leadership

But, as we review the way Judah behaved in this week's parsha that was found wanting, the question can be asked, why did he deserve to become the model of leadership for all future generations?

There are two incidents in this week's parsha that describe the way Judah saved a person's life. In the first narrative, the Torah relates how Joseph's brothers sought to kill him. Judah intervenes and convinces them to sell him into slavery instead. This was the first example of a leader, who overrules his older brothers and convinces them to spare Joseph's life.

And though he saved Joseph's life, this intervention did not suffice to establish his credentials as a leader. In fact, this half-baked intervention is harshly criticized by our Talmudic Sages. Indeed, they state that his brothers—upon seeing the anguish their father suffered—"demoted" Judah from his position of prominence. They felt, that had he argued for Joseph's complete freedom, they would have complied and Jacob would have been spared this horrible ordeal of losing his beloved child.

Nevertheless, the fact that he recognized that he had erred and behaved differently in a second situation was what made him worthy as the model for ideal leadership.

Correction!

In the first instance, Judah, though he saved his brother's life, he did not (a) finish the job; (b) sacrifice his own prestige or comfort to do so. One of the tests of character, and therefore of leadership, is the way one behaves when they choose the well-being of another over the protection of their own honor and reputation.

This did occur in the second narrative that involved Judah and his daughter-in-law Tamar. Tamar's two husbands died because of their evil ways. According to existing tradition, Tamar was expected to marry Judah's third surviving son,

or even Judah himself. (Marrying a widowed daughter-in-law was not yet prohibited.)

When Judah hesitated to fulfill his obligation, Tamar disguised herself as a harlot and seduced Judah from whom she conceived. In several months, when it became apparent that Tamar—who was expected to marry, and therefore considered to be semi-attached to Judah's third son or to Judah himself—had an affair, she was convicted of "adultery" and sentenced to death. When she produced the items that Judah gave her in lieu of payment for her "services," he readily confessed that he was the one responsible for her situation, and her life was spared. To spare himself the embarrassment caused by his confession, he could have easily denied everything. Yet Judah chose to overlook his own honor and save a life.

The fact that Judah put aside his own honor and reputation for the well-being of another proved to be his worthiness as a leader of his people. Of course, the ideal leader must possess many other qualities as well, but the fact that the first actions of Judah-the first Jewish leader—involved the saving of an individual's life, is significant.

A true Jewish leader—contrary to most political and religious leaders of our time—has to put the interests of his people—even of one individual—ahead of his own personal interest and prestige. This was the hallmark of

Jewish leadership throughout the ages, and this is one of the signs that we will use to determine the identity of the ultimate leader—Moshiach.

Moshiach's Resume

When Maimonides codifies the qualifications for the Moshiach, the ultimate redeemer and leader of the Jewish people, he includes the one about Moshiach being a descendent of King David. Not only does the Moshiach have to be an actual descendant of King David—and hence from Judah—he must also inherit their positive traits. The Moshiach is a leader who devotes his whole life, and is prepared to sacrifice everything, for even one individual who is in need.

But, the Ba'al Shem Tov taught that every one of us possesses a spark of Moshiach. In the process of Redemption through Moshiach, it is crucial that we all awaken this spark that will propel us to work for the benefit of even one individual, even when it is at the expense of our own ego and reputation.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

TARMODIAN FEET

One cannot fight rebelliousness using conventional means of education and persuasion.

There was no rational basis for the handful of ill-trained priests to start a rebellion against the Syrian Greek Empire.

But, a rebel does not necessarily limit himself to logic. It takes chutzpah to do what the Maccabees did.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

TARMODIAN FEET

Recurrent Holy Chutzpah

This week's parsha features several stories that required a lot of chutzpah, in the positive sense of the word.

Joseph risks his life to see how his brothers are faring.

Tamar risks her life not to embarrass her father-in-law Judah.

Joseph risks his future by stubbornly resisting the seduction of Potiphar's wife.

This Shabbos, we commence the Holiday of Chanukah, the highlight of which is the lighting of Chanukah lights for eight consecutive nights.

It is well-known that there is always a connection between the weekly Torah reading and any holiday that occurs in the same week. It follows then that there is a connection between the chutzpah exhibited in this week's parsha and the story of Chanukah.

Chanukah Chutzpah

The chutzpah associated with Chanukah can be traced back to the Talmud's discussion of the laws of Chanukah.

When the Talmud discusses the requirements for the lighting of the Menorah it states that the Chanukah lights must stay lit (or, at least, have enough fuel) "until the Tarmodians have vanished from the market."

Rashi explains that the Tarmodians were a group of people who sold firewood in the city markets. They remained longest in the market until the people returned home in the evening to start their fires and those in need of firewood returned to the market to purchase it.

The question has been asked why does the Talmud have to mention the name of the people who provided wood in the marketplace. Couldn't the Talmud just say that the Chanukah lights must last until such time that all the people have left the marketplace, after which time there are no people left who can see the Chanukah lights?

Tarmodian Rebels

The answer to this question lies in a better understanding of the Tarmodians and what they stood for. The Talmud tells us that the Tarmodians were a group of slaves who

rebelled against King Solomon. Hence these people were used as a symbol of rebellious behavior.

Furthermore, the very name Tarmod, when rearranged spells the word *moredes*, which means a rebel.

When one ventures outside, they will discover a plethora of beliefs and practices. The glut of diverse beliefs that exist "out there" are represented by the metaphor of the marketplace. Some of these ideas are desirable, some are neutral, some undesirable and some downright evil and rebellious. This last category is represented by the Tarmodians, whose history and name express the attitude of rebellion.

Hence, the Talmud states that the Chanukah lights must be so effective as to completely eliminate all traces of this rebellious attitude from the marketplace of ideas.

Chanukah represents the victory of light over darkness and pure Judaism over the adulterated version the Hellenists tried to impose on all the Jews. The Chanukah victory is not complete until all traces of rebelliousness have been removed.

Fighting Rebelliousness with Rebelliousness

There is yet another dimension inherent in the Tarmodian metaphor. Just as the objective of Chanukah is to remove

the "rebels" from the marketplace, the method we employ to accomplish that goal is also one of rebelliousness. Indeed, the very heroes of Chanukah, the Maccabees, were rebels in their own right.

One cannot fight rebelliousness using conventional means of education and persuasion. If logic would have prevailed, the Maccabees would have thrown in the towel. There was no rational basis for the handful of ill-trained priests to start a rebellion against the Syrian Greek Empire. But, a rebel does not necessarily limit himself to logic. It takes chutzpah to do what the Maccabees did.

By acting as rebels, who defied the overwhelmingly superior forces of the Syrian Greeks, military strategy and logic itself, they elicited the unconventional Divine forces that rebel against the laws of nature that dictate that the strong prevail over the weak.

And it was this "rebellious" energy that provided the lone cruse of oil with the capacity to last for eight nights instead of one.

Modern Day Chutzpah to Greet Moshiach

Chanukah lights have been compared to the light of Moshiach. Today we are in need of rebellious energies to overcome the chutzpah of the world's tyrants, terrorists

and immoral leaders. We also pray to G-d that, as in the days of old, He should assert His unconventional Divine authority and power to bring us Moshiach and the final Redemption.

ESSAY NINETEEN

KEEPING OUR CHANUKAH LIGHTS IN OUR EYE'S SIGHT

Moshiach will succeed in achieving the goal of transforming the outside.

Moshiach is a warrior against the influences that threaten the integrity of the Torah, Jewish people and the Land of Israel.

Moshiach is more than that.

He will influence every Jew to follow in the ways of G-d and indeed, he will even reach out and perfect the entire world, thereby bringing true peace and unity.

Moshiach will transform the "snakes and scorpions" into positive forces.

ESSAY NINETEEN

KEEPING OUR CHANUKAH LIGHTS IN OUR EYE'S SIGHT

No Water but Plenty of Snakes and Scorpions

Joseph's brothers conspired to kill him out of jealousy, but the oldest brother Reuven stepped in and convinced his brothers to throw Joseph into an empty pit. Reuven intended to take him out later and return him to his father.

The Torah describes the pit as: "And the pit was empty, it had no water in it."

The Talmud (Shabbos 22a), quoting Rabbi Tanchum, notes the redundancy here and states:

> From the words "it was empty" do I not know that it had no water in it? Why then does the Torah have to state "it had no water in it?" It is to tell us that while it had no water, it did contain snakes and scorpions

An obvious question arises: if the pit was infested with deadly snakes and scorpions, what was Reuven thinking when he threw Joseph into the pit? If his intention was

indeed to save Joseph's life, what did Reuven think he was gaining by surrendering Joseph to these deadly creatures? (See Essays 6 and 16 for alternative explanations.)

Nachmanides writes that it is obvious that the brothers did not know these creatures were present, for had they known and seen Joseph remain unscathed, they would have realized that he was a righteous person for whom G-d had performed a miracle.

From this comment, it is clear that the Torah wants us to know that Joseph was indeed a righteous individual and deserved to be saved from these deadly creatures. Lest we had begun to indict Joseph for inciting his brothers against him and concluded that he was an unworthy heir to his father's legacy, we are informed that, on the contrary, he was perfectly righteous.

There is another, deeper explanation for why the Torah emphasizes that there were snakes and scorpions in the pit that reveals to us Joseph's greatness.

The fact that Joseph was thrown into a pit of deadly snakes and scorpions is emblematic of his uncanny moral and spiritual strength. It was strength that his brothers did not possess and for which reason they so misunderstood him. Joseph, unlike most others, could be cast into a pit of snakes and scorpions, literally and figuratively, and still be immune to their venom.

Joseph Misunderstood

To better understand Joseph's uniqueness we must preface our thoughts with the analysis offered by Chassidus:

The Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as well as Jacob's sons, were shepherds. That allowed them to remain divorced from the corrupt and degenerate urban areas of society. By becoming shepherds, they had the freedom to engage in deep spiritual meditation. Indeed, it was Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who instituted the three daily prayers of Shacharis, Mincha and Ma'ariv. These were not perfunctory prayers but profound meditative experiences that connected them to G-d and divorced them from spiritual "snakes" and "scorpions."

Joseph was different; and it would seem not in such a good way. He was not a shepherd. In fact, he appeared to be a lightweight contender for the legacy of the Patriarchs. Joseph engaged in what most observers would think was immature behavior; focusing on his looks and clothes. In later years, upon reaching greater maturity, he transitioned into a worldly person, ultimately running Egypt. Both his youthful endeavors and his later secular leadership would hardly seem to prepare him to follow the lead of his brothers, parents, grandparents and great-grandparents, who were no-nonsense spiritual people.

This, Chassidic thought explains, is why his brothers hated him. It was not a petty jealousy. They were concerned and deeply troubled that Joseph's behavior represented a serious departure from the tradition of the Patriarchs. They thought Joseph was turning out to be another Yishmael or Esau, who strayed far from the path trodden by Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In short, he was an embarrassment and they feared he would even pose a spiritual and physical threat to their family.

Lived Seamlessly in Both Worlds

As we know, their fears were unfounded. Joseph possessed a singular talent for constancy. He was not affected by his environment. In Chassidic literature, Joseph is depicted as one who was a resident of two worlds, simultaneously.

On the one hand, his soul was from and reflected the highest spiritual world of Atzilus, the world of G-dly emanation. It is a realm where G-d's light shines brightly and where even the vessels, i.e., the instruments that contain and channel the light, are transparent. Yet, at the same time, Joseph was able to live in the most secular and hostile of places without losing his connection to the lofty world of Atzilus.

Joseph possessed the potential to withstand both the icy indifference of a secular environment and to resist its powerful temptations.

These two threats are represented by the twin metaphors of snakes and scorpions. Our Sages teach that a snake's venom is "hot" whereas the scorpion's is "cold." In spiritual and moral terms this means that the "snake" personality possesses unholy and immoral passions. The scorpion's "cold" venom, by contrast, represents one who is coldly indifferent to anything holy and spiritual.

The fact that Joseph was thrown into a pit infested with these poisonous threats and survived demonstrated Divine Providence. It was also an omen that he would be subjected to both of these challenges, inappropriate passions and secular distraction, but pass them with flying colors.

Moreover, Joseph possessed another unique quality. It was his ability to influence others to follow in his footsteps. The third Rebbe of Chabad, known as the Tzemach Tzedek, retranslates the verse in last week's parsha, which explains why he was called Joseph. The simple translation of his mother's words upon naming him is: "May G-d add another son for me." The Tzemach Tzedek retranslates this as: "may G-d make an 'other' (an outsider) into a son." In other words, Joseph was capable of reaching even the Jew who

considers himself or herself to be an outsider, an "other," and transform him or her into a son, the ultimate insider.

Had his brothers been aware of Joseph's righteousness, as demonstrated by his immunity from the physical snakes and scorpions and imperviousness to the associated spiritual threats, they would have never challenged him.

Pits and Chanukah Lights

We can now begin to understand why the Talmud juxtaposes Rabbi Tanchum's statement that the pit was infested with snakes and scorpions with his statement concerning that Chanukah lights may not be placed at a height greater than 20 cubits.

Commentators have grappled with the juxtaposition of these two totally unrelated statements. What connection is there between the placement of a Chanukah Menorah and Joseph being thrown into a pit infested with snakes and scorpions? (See also Essays 6 and 16 for alternative explanations.)

We may also ask, what is the connection of these two statements to their author, Rabbi Tanchum? The name Tanchum relates to consolation and is usually associated with the ultimate consolation that we will receive from G-d in the imminent Redemption through our righteous

Moshiach. According to the Talmud, Moshiach's name is Menachem, which shares Tanchum's root; they both relate to the notion of consolation.

In light of our preceding analysis of the brother's misunderstanding of Joseph we can discover a connection between these two statements:

The Chanukah lights emerged out of the attempt by the Syrian-Greeks to contaminate the soul of the Jewish people. It has been suggested that the reason we place the Menorah at the **entrances** of our homes as a remembrance of how the enemy removed the doors of the homes of the Jewish people so that they could not hide their observance of Judaism.

In other words, the Syrian-Greeks did everything in their power to ensure the infiltration of malign outside influences into every Jewish home and heart. There were to be no barriers to block the "snakes" and "scorpions" from entering.

The Chanukah lights that we place at our entrances or our windows cannot be contaminated, just like the lone cruse of uncontaminated oil that lasted for eight days. This parallels Joseph's first quality: that he was impervious to outside influences.

Moreover, just as Joseph was not content simply to resist the negative forces, but also transformed the "other-

outsider" into a "son-insider," so too, the Chanukah lights illuminate the darkness of the night. It has the power to transform night into light; the "other" into a son.

However, in order for the Chanukah lights to have their intended effect they cannot be placed beyond eye contact. A Menorah placed so high that the eye does not easily notice it cannot illuminate the darkness.

We can now also understand the connection of these statements to the name of Rabbi Tanchum. As stated, Tanchum is closely related to Moshiach. Moshiach will succeed in achieving the goal of transforming the outside. Moshiach is known as a warrior against the influences that threaten the integrity of the Torah, Jewish people and the Land of Israel. But Moshiach is more than that. He will influence every Jew to follow in the ways of G-d and indeed, he will even reach out and perfect the entire world, thereby bringing true peace and unity.

Moshiach will transform the snakes and scorpions into positive forces. Indeed, the word snake in Hebrew (*Nachash)* has the same numerical value as Moshiach (358). And the word scorpion in Hebrew (*Akrav)* equals the numerical value of "Moshiach" combined with "David."

Moshiach inherited from Joseph the power to accomplish these things, for Joseph was singularly endowed with the abilities associated with Moshiach.

All of us possess a spark of Moshiach, especially now that the Rebbe informed us that the Redemption is in front of us. The only impediment before us is if we place the symbol of Moshiach, the Chanukah lights, so high that our eyes do not see them.

This echoes the Rebbe's repeated exhortation to us that we must "open our eyes" to see the energy and light of Moshiach and Redemption in front of us.

ESSAY TWENTY

SIGNET RING, CLOAK AND STAFF

The soul when it descends into our physical world to inhabit a body is no longer "attached" to its heavenly source.

The soul, detached though it may be down here, possesses a superior strength that it receives from the soul's very essence.

When in its heavenly abode, the soul does not need that powerful attribute, which remains dormant until the soul's descent into the physical world.

ESSAY TWENTY

SIGNET RING, CLOAK AND STAFF

Yehudah's Descent

After the sale of Joseph into captivity by his brothers, Yehudah, who suggested selling Joseph rather than killing him, "descended" from his brothers and got married. His wife bore him three sons. He married his oldest son, Er, to Tamar. After she was widowed, she married Yehudah's second son, Onan. When he died too, Yehudah decided that Tamar should remain a widow because he was reluctant to allow her to marry his last son, Sheilah.

After Yehudah's wife died, Tamar disguised herself as a harlot; Yehudah propositioned her and promised to send her a goat to pay for their liaison. When she asked him for his signet ring, cloak and staff as collateral against that promise, he agreed.

We know that the Torah does not just tell us stories. Each and every detail is fraught with meaning and contains many deeper and deeper layers of knowledge.

Why would the Torah go into such detail about Yehudah's payment and collateral for this relationship? The question begs that we seek a deeper understanding of this entire episode, especially since it was from this union that Peretz was born. Peretz is closely associated with Moshiach. First, he was the direct ancestor of King David, from whose line Moshiach would emerge. Second, the very name Peretz means "to break out of boundaries" which aptly describes Moshiach. It is his role, as one whose influence is "out of the box", to break through the walls of Galus.

The fact that Peretz's birth is associated with the items Yehudah gave as collateral (his signet ring, cloak and staff) suggests that these three items may symbolize an unconventional leadership.

Leadership, Leadership and Leadership

The Midrash on this verse connects these three items to three forms of leadership. The signet ring represents royalty and refers specifically to Yechaniah (or Chaniah), the last monarch to reign before the Babylonian exile. In his lament of the imminent exile, the prophet Jeremiah describes G-d as exclaiming: ""...though Chaniah the son of Yehoyakim king of Judah were the signet upon My right hand..." (Yirmiyahu 22:24). Hence Tamar's prescient

demand for the signet ring was prophetic and alluded to their offspring's future role in royalty.

The Midrash also teaches the figurative meaning of the cloak and staff Yehudah gave Tamar: "the cloak refers to the Sanhedrin... and the staff refers to the King Moshiach, as it is stated: 'And there shall come forth a shoot out of the stock of Jesse...' (Isaiah 11:1), and it is stated 'G-d will stretch forth your mighty staff from Zion...' " (Tehillim 110:2)

How can we understand why Tamar prophesied about these three periods of leadership that would emerge from her union with Yehudah?

If she was predicting royalty that royalty would emerge from her union with Yehudah, why did she not allude to Kings David and Solomon? After all, they were the progenitors of the Davidic dynasty and laid the foundation for and actually built the Bais Hamikdash.

Resisting, Coping and Surviving the Exile

Tamar saw even further into the future of the Jewish people and realized that it would be a long trek before Moshiach ushers in an age of spiritual and physical perfection. The Jewish people would need to go through much travail before their redemption. When she gazed

penetratingly at the future, she saw that there would be three periods in which her descendants would serve as the support for the Jewish nation before the final Redemption. Each period would require a different stage of leadership.

The first stage of leadership she saw was when the last king reigned before the Babylonian exile. She saw that he is associated with G-d's seal. What is a seal? It is a sign of confirmation and permanence revealed, in this context, through the unique impression left by the design of a signet ring. Moreover, our Sages tell us that "G-d's seal is truth." It is ironic that this manifestation of G-d's seal occurred precisely when king Yechaniah (or Chonia), a scion of the Davidic dynasty, was on the threshold of Babylonian exile!

Tamar, however, saw it differently. On the surface it seemed that the leadership of the king Chonia and the Davidic dynasty was coming to an end. Tamar, however, knew that G-d would promise David that "his light will never be extinguished." Tamar was prophetically aware that David's descendants would continue to exercise influence over the exiled Jewish people. They helped enable the people to cope with the harsh realities of exile and keep the Jewish community intact. This was in stark contrast with the 10 "lost" tribes exiled a century earlier who assimilated and disappeared from the Jewish community.

Tamar was not satisfied. It was not enough just to survive and cope with adversity. A Jew comes into this world to grow and thrive spiritually. What will keep them going even when the overt role of Davidic royalty ceases?

The answer she received in her prophetic words was the "cloak." This was a reference to the mantle of leadership vested in the Sanhedrin, an important institution that flourished and exercised incredible influence over Jewish life for many centuries. The Sanhedrin leadership included descendants of Tamar and Yehudah. It did far more than just keep the status quo. The Sanhedrin and its heirs, the Torah Sages of Israel, guided the Jewish people to incredible life and growth.

The Staff and the Branch

Tamar's prophecy did not end there. She saw a third element, the *mateh*-staff which symbolized the final stage in the Galus saga: Moshiach and the Redemption he leads.

The Hebrew word for staff, *mateh*, is often contrasted with its synonym, *shevet*. The difference is that the *shevet* represents the branch of the tree when it is still connected to the tree, whereas the *mateh* describes that very same branch once it is detached from the tree and hardened into a staff.

Upon reflection, we can see that the *mateh* possesses a paradoxical nature. On the one hand, it lacks the life and vibrancy of the *shevet*. The *mateh* is no longer connected to its source of life, yet, the *mateh* is firm and unbending, unlike the pliable and flexible *shevet*. What do these diametrically opposite features symbolize?

The Rebbe, in a talk on the Torah portion entitled *Matos* (Likkutei Sichos, Volume 18, p. 382), explains that the detached state of the *mateh* symbolizes the state of the soul when it descends into our physical world to inhabit a body. It is no longer "attached" to its heavenly source, unlike the soul when it is still in its G-dly abode prior to descent into our world.

However, as a result of the challenges that the storms the soul must weather down here, it must be endowed with additional power. The soul, detached though it may be down here, possesses a superior strength that it receives from the soul's very essence. Kabbalah and Chassidus refer to this strength as the *eisan*, the hard-core strength of the soul. When in its heavenly abode, the soul does not need that powerful attribute, which remains dormant until the soul's descent into the physical world.

Furthermore, as we meet the challenges of the physical world and overcome its obstacles, the soul's *eisan* further

strengthens us and reveals the even greater power of the soul.

In his discussion of the difference between the *shevet* and *mateh* states of the soul, the Rebbe also draws a parallel to the period in history when we had our Bais Hamikdash-Holy Temple and then our subsequent period of exile.

When the Bais Hamikdash stood, G-d's glory was revealed to the world, overt miracles abounded and the Jewish people were in the *shevet* state; they felt their attachment to G-d. However, as a result of the Galus exiles we lost that state of attachment and were relegated to the *mateh* state.

Precisely because we have soujourned in this detached state of Galus for nearly two millenia, we have been forced to elicit the most powerful forces from the essence of our souls. Galus has revealed within us that we have unprecedented powers to resist the darkness and even convert it to light.

The staff that Yehudah, the progenitor of Moshiach, gave Tamar as collateral, represented the future power of Moshiach to cope with Galus conditions and enable all of the Jewish people he leads to summon their own *eisan.* The Rebbe explains that Moshiach is a Galus leader who brings out the best in us to resist, cope, manage, thrive, and then transform the Galus into the triumphant Geulah-Redemption.

"Give Me the Power of the *Mateh*!"

We can now read the story of Yehudah and Tamar more deeply in a new, uplifting fashion:

Tamar represents the Jewish people. Yehudah (whose name contains the four letters of G-d's sacred name) is a metaphor for G-d, who saves the Jewish people from the state of widowhood, i.e., estrangement from G-d, the metaphoric "husband" of the Jewish nation.

Yehudah (read: G-d) asks us: "What collateral shall I give you to guarantee your survival until I bring the Redemption? What power do you need to preserve yourself in the bitter harshness of Galus so you can prepare for and experience the glory of the Redemption?"

Tamar (the Jewish people) answers, "It is the signet ring, the cloak and staff … that you have in **your** hand." It is the power of royalty found in G-d's hands that He passed over to us (Tamar). We never lost the regal status that this conferred upon us and which was responsible for our survival, even in exile.

Beginning with Yechaniah, continuing through the Sanhedrin (and their spiritual heirs, the Sages and teachers of Torah throughout the ages), and finally through Moshiach himself, we were and are empowered to survive, even thrive and eventually transform our exile. Indeed, the true purpose of a leader is to reveal the power of royalty

and leadership that resides in each and every one of us, so we can be masters over our lives and our Galus environment.

Moshiach's role in particular is to reveal the spark of Moshiach, the *mateh* and the *eisan*, that exists within each and every Jew and by so doing, conclude Tamar's vision for the future and usher in the ultimate Age of union between Tamar (the Jewish people) and Yehudah (G-d).

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

TWIN STORIES

The entire Messianic process is one of mystery.

Moshiach comes when it is least expected.

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO
TWIN STORIES

Joseph and Judah Intertwined

In this week's parsha there are two stories that appear to be unrelated, but upon deeper reflection are intimately connected.

The first is the rivalry between Joseph and his brothers and the second is the narrative of Judah and his relationship with his daughter-in-law Tamar.

In both of these stories the issue of ultimate leadership is at their very core. Joseph asserts his role as the leader of the sons of Jacob for which he is reviled and almost killed and finally sold into slavery. Judah, fathers a son Peretz who becomes the ancestor of King David and the Davidic dynasty until Moshiach.

The story of Judah is intriguing. Judah does not allow his twice widowed daughter-in-law Tamar to marry his third son Shelah. Tamar disguises herself and seduces Judah

when he was on a business trip. Subsequently he discovered that she was pregnant and when he confronted her she hinted to him that he was the father of her unborn children. She then gives birth to twins, the first one to emerge was Zarach, whereupon his brother pushes ahead and she names him Peretz, because it means to break out of boundaries.

Shrouded in Mystery

This entire episode is shrouded in mystery. Everything happens undercover. Judah hid his intention from her that he would not allow her to marry his third son Shelah. Tamar covers her face to seduce Judah. Tamar disappears when Judah wants to pay for her services. When Tamar is lead to be punished for her indiscretion, she merely hints to Judah that he was the one who is responsible for her pregnancy. The fact that she was going to have twins was not known even to Tamar. She gives birth prematurely when she did not expect it. When Peretz was born, he comes out of the shadows, so to speak and takes first place.

What is all this mystery about?

The Mystery of the Messianic Process

Our Sages tell us that Peretz was the ancestor of King David and Moshiach. The entire Messianic process is one of mystery. Moshiach comes when it is least expected. The Talmud says, "Moshiach comes when we are distracted."

Commentators point out, that the leadership of Joseph and the leadership of Judah—which suffered a temporary setback because of his role in the sale of Joseph—are the precursors of the two Moshiach's: Moshiach ben Yosef and Moshiach ben David.

Indeed, according to some commentators, the reason the Joseph's brothers wanted to kill him is because they believed that Judah had the status of a king, and Joseph strongly intimated that he was going to be their leader. According to Jewish law, one who rebels against the king is tantamount to treason and deserves the death penalty.

Their error was that Joseph's leadership—as with respect to his descendants' role as Moshiach—is merely a prelude to the ultimate leadership of Judah's descendent: Moshiach ben David.

The Two Moshiachs

The two Moshiach's represent the difference between fighting evil and generating positive energy:

Moshiach ben Yosef's role is to fight evil and Moshiach ben David builds the Bais Hamikdash and usher in an era of peace and G-dly light.

According to an inference from the Zohar, Moshiach ben David is also Moshiach ben Yosef. These two parts of his soul manifest themselves in his two roles. First, Moshiach fights evil and then he will complete the task as Moshiach ben David to usher in an age of complete goodness and positive energy.

Our preparation for these two aspects of the Messianic Age is to combat evil but to recognize that the ultimate goal is the introduction of G-dly light into our lives and the entire world.